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# REALMS OF FANTASY

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# "To each his own," said the princess as she kissed the cow.

I FRANKLY HAVE NO IDEA WHY the princess is kissing the cow, nor who it was who might have had the nerve to ask her about it. It was, however, one of my mother's favorite responses when I'd ask her how she could possibly like, say, scrapple, or Telly Savalas. (I was much younger then — as I age, Kojak begins to look better and better.)

I do know that while the princess part of the equation always puzzled me, the "to each his own" part always made perfect sense. I realized early on that while I might love chopped chicken liver, many of my friends thought this was about as gross as food could get. (This does not count scrapple, which literally is as gross as food could get.) I picked Sulu over Kirk, Ilya over Napoleon, and John over Paul. But I completely understood that my friends could and often did feel differently. In fact, it was the differences in opinion that gave us something to talk about. (Parents of teenagers, take note. This sort of thing is most likely what's tying up your phone night after night.)

That's why (she gets to the point) I publish so many different sorts of stories in *RoF*. Sure, some of you might like to see a magazine full of nothing but sword and sorcery, or barbarian babes in brass bikinis, or talking unicorns, or evil wizards, or — you name it. And you know what? There are magazines out there (not as beautiful or wonderful as ours, of course, but out there nonetheless) that will satisfy your desires in these areas. Years in publishing have taught me nothing if not this — no matter how unusual or narrow your interests might be, there's a magazine out there just for you. (Why in our house alone, we get a magazine on fine scale modeling, one on modern Egyptology, one on movie special effects, one on World War I airplanes, and one on the *Titanic*. Oh, and one on vertebrate paleontology. This is all true.)

So if you want a steady diet of standard fantasy, you can get it. But remember, fans do not live by magic bread with a spell of invisibility on it alone. You've got to expand your horizons, try something a bit new, give yourselves something to talk about other than the fact that Bedwyn's broadsword was inaccurately described. No, I'm not going to start publishing stories in free verse, or

translated from the Urdu, but I am going to continue to present pieces that represent the vast arena in which fantasy and the imagination can play.

The whole point (as I see it, anyway) of reading fantasy and science fiction, as opposed to, say, mainstream fiction, is that it gives your brain some much-needed exercise. Think of it this way: Your brain sits around all day thinking about things like whether the girl three rows over actually winked at you or did she have something in her eye; or what did your boss mean when she said, "Nice work, Jones." Your brain hardly ever gets to stretch its muscles and run — your imagination gets precious little workout in an average day. Pick up some fantasy or science fiction, though, and suddenly your brain is doing one-armed pushups. But if you read only the same authors or sub-genres, well, then, you're putting your brain back in jail — you're not challenging it or giving it anything new to process.

You know, I often remember a quote I heard in a film class I once took. When asked why every Marx Brothers' movie had classical music, opera, or ballet in it, the producer replied, "I'm not gonna give the public what they want. I'm gonna give 'em what they want, and more!" He had hoped that by including some "culture" with the slapstick, the moviegoers who went just for the comedy would be painlessly exposed to something a little bigger, a little more complex, and realize that, "Hey, this stuff is pretty damn good." And I believe it worked — I don't recall anyone ever walking out of a Marx Brothers' movie saying, "That was funny, I guess, but I wish they'd lose the damn harp."

And so it is with *Realms of Fantasy* — sure, I'm gonna give you what you want — but I hope that after you've had it, you'll be glad that there's a little bit more in here to satisfy your hunger for the new.

P.S. On a wholly different topic, please allow me to take this space to let you know that while I have an E-mail address for letters to the editor, I accept neither submissions nor requests for editorial guidelines electronically. Any submissions or guidelines requests that come in that way will be unfortunately ignored, since I don't have the ability to respond easily to a multitude of E-mail requests. ♪

Shawna McCarthy

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WHERE IMAGINATION KNOWS NO BOUNDS

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Dear Shawna,

I'd like to make a comment about Mark Sumner's article on *Warcraft II*. He makes a point about saying that the editor for the game can only be run under Windows 95. This is true but Windows 3.1 users can run the editor by downloading two files from Microsoft's bulletin board (206-936-6735). The files are PW118.EXE and WING10.EXE (both are self-extracting). Once installed, *Warcraft II* owners can run the WAR2EDIT.EXE program which has all the features offered under the Windows 95 version.

Kenneth Jakubec

Thanks for the info, Kenneth. I'm not sure what it means, but I'm certain others will find it useful!

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I would just like to congratulate you and your staff for presenting one of the finest magazines I have ever seen. I have been a subscriber to *RoF* since the first issue. As an avid reader of *Sci-Fi Fantasy*, I'd like to express my gratitude for capturing what many other magazines can't — my attention. *Realms of Fantasy* is an excellent quality magazine, and I plan on continuing my collection of your magazines as long as they exist.

Ralph E. Ehnstrom II

Those near and dear to you will be interested to know that we'll release your attention after \$250,000 in small unmarked bills is left for us in a locker at the bus station ... Just joking, Ralph. We'll never release your attention!

Dear Mrs. McCarthy,

In the Letters column in the April issue you told Steve Leavell that if he wished to continue as a writer he needed to learn the basics.

My question is, how do you learn the basics? I am a junior in high school and try to apply what I have learned in my grammar and literature courses to my own meager attempts at putting pen to paper, but most often I only end up creating hollow works that have no depth or meaning and read like third-rate trash. I read everything I can get my hands on, regardless of genre. I try to examine different authors' styles and techniques and apply them to my own penning, but with no apparent results.

What frustrates me the most, though, is that oftentimes I have beautiful ideas in my head, but they don't want to be put on the page. How do I get these thoughts from my head to the paper?

To wrap these ramblings up, I would just like to say that your magazine is absolutely stunning. The work is beyond first-rate; it is obviously a labor of love. It is a great educational tool to my friends and classmates. Even my friends who like fantasy too often associ-

ated it with just dungeons and dragons type stories. The stories in *RoF* have opened their eyes to the whole spectrum of fantasy.

John Rodenbiker

How do you learn the basics? Sounds to me like you already have. Your letter shows me that you're familiar with the concepts of punctuation and spelling, and are willing to work hard and read critically and voluminously. Your ability to self-criticize is standing you in good stead now, and will continue to do so in the future. Those are the basics. The rest is, I'm sorry to say, mainly a question of — how to put this? — "maturity." As a high-school junior, I'm well aware that you have loads of thoughts and feelings that cry out for expression. However, you haven't yet accumulated the years of experience that will show you how to put these ideas in context. For a textbook example of what not to do, however, see below.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I want to extend gratitude to you for returning my recent submission with a "form" rejection letter.

Since your form letter did not give reasons for the rejection of my story, let me make an observation. My story had no grammatical or "composition" errors (if you had spotted any, they would have been imagined, as I have graduate degrees in English and do not make such errors). Your other listed reasons dealt with "old ideas" or stories that simply didn't "stand out." If this were your rationale, you simply must not have read the cover letter I sent with the manuscript. Or, more likely, you simply misunderstood the story. It was supposed to seem like many ordinary fantasy stories, but it was, in truth, not. In fact, it was a story about conventional, familiar stories. It is reasonable to conclude that you entirely missed the metafictional components of the story. I'm not saying that the story was the best of its kind ever written, but many literary critics with whom I am acquainted appreciated the underlying meanings in the story. You quite clearly did not.

It is probably just as well that you did choose not to accept this story, since its meaning obviously slipped by you and would very likely slip by many of your readers. If this sounds like hubris, perhaps it is, but I have examined several issues of your magazine and find that much of the material you've chosen to publish therein is ... well, let us say, quite average and lacks in real literary worth. I doubt my story would "fit" well among many of those stories. Average and clumsily written, cliché-filled fantasy stories work only to perpetuate the attitude within most literary and academic circles that the entire genre of fantasy is nothing more than popular, valueless dribble.

By the way, your response time rivals that

of some of the slower academic journals in existence. They at least respond with more than impersonal, unprofessional form letters.

David Flanagin

Oh, I'm sorry, David. I didn't realize I was supposed to publish your cover letter along with the manuscript. Of course people would have understood it then! Or maybe they wouldn't have — obviously my readership is so, so, well ... so that a story as magnificent as yours might well have been beyond them. And semi-literate, poorly educated writers like Tanith Lee and Robert Silverberg might have been shamed into obscurity had your story appeared in the same issue with theirs. You're right! It's lucky for all concerned that I chose not to accept your story — I'm sure my readers are even now breathing a sigh of relief.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Please pass my compliments to Lisa R. Cohen — her story "Leuka and Phlego" (or "The Black Medallion," per the cover) is one of my favorite stories from *RoF*. Or from any collection of short stories, in any genre. I couldn't put it down! She writes beautifully.

Regina L. Preciado

I'm sure the author is delighted to hear how much you enjoyed her work.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Well, I've been meaning to write you since the premiere issue of this magazine, but HEY! Better late than never I LOVE this magazine! I've been a die-hard "Fantasy" reader since the Narnia series got me hooked when I was 10. Now, 15 years and a collection of about 300 books later, I have finally found a magazine to complement my absolutely wonderful habit!

OK, now that I have you all buttered up, I'd like to make a suggestion. Just a token, really a trifle ... Do you think you could do a "Gallery" on the pre-Raphaelites? Just those few works that you printed in the "Folknoths" of April 1996 (Merlin and Melusine ... thumbs up on that piece, Terri!), were so beautiful that I would love to see more! You know what else would be very nice? A piece on the interesting "Fantasy" oriented web sites. Keep up the good work.

Jennifer Abramson

Well, from your mouth to the publisher's ear! Both your suggestions sound like good ones, and we'll try to find writers who can handle them. Keep enjoying the magazine.

Your letters and comments are welcome. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writers' guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com. ☛



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## Beware! Sniffing ghosts can become addicting.

**I**F YOU HAVE COME ACROSS ANY OF TIM POWERS' PREVIOUS NOVELS — *LAST CALL*; *ON Stranger Tides*; *The Anubis Gate* — you will be aware that he is an extremely witty author, a fine stylist, and a man who knows his history and also how to use it.

One of the toughest hurdles needed clearing by anyone attempting to produce the artful fantastic is to make sure one's imaginings are, indeed, fantastic, and not paler, weaker versions of past or present reality. It takes, when you come to think of it, one hell of a lot of nerve to believe that the circuitry contained in that little pink pudding lodged in your head is capable of coming up with some notion that will be more bizarrely imaginative than the images the Hubbell 'scope is routinely sending back to us, or even top what a good magnifying glass can spot during a really careful examination of what's accumulated lately on the soles of your shoes.

Personally I have come a cropper more times than I care to think of in my efforts to create and present some daft notion that will outdo day-to-day realities. I remember being very proud of the noxious excesses featured in a spread I did for the *National Lampoon* — during its long-

gone glory days — called "Holy Land." It described an entertainment park presenting religious exhibits the whole family could participate in, among them the terrifying "Resurrection Ride" and a "Carry Your Own Cross" marathon. I felt I had not only firmly lived up to the magazine's policy of always being in the worst taste, but that I had made up and presented the notion of an enterprise too idiotic and ludicrous to be seriously considered by any actual showman, or patronized by any actual family on vacation. Imagine my surprise when readers from all points in the nation gleefully (readers of the *Lampoon* always sensibly enjoyed pricking the ego balloons of its contributors and I think it did us good) sent me actual, real-live pamphlets describing and picturing existing religious fun parks that were not only in worst taste than my own but more blasphemous by far.

Another humiliating episode was my assignment by a West Coast newspaper to do a cover for their Sunday graphics section (how old-timey that description seems today!) showing a dead family in their car, asphyxiated by the fumes of a Los Angeles freeway. I drew the thing and sent it in, flushed with pride at the way I had imagined and skillfully rendered the awful killer smog. The very next day, on the front page of *The New York Times*, no less, there was featured a photograph showing an actual Los Angeles freeway with towering plumes of smog so much deadlier and gloriously horrific than my own feeble imaginings that it lent me a humble mien that has persisted to this day.

Tim Powers, though, has worked out a diabolically clever technique to avoid this kind of pratfall. What he does — his little trick is clearly revealed by the depth of scholarship and amazing richness of factual reference in all his books, and most certainly his latest, *Expiration Date* (Tor Books, NY, 381 pp., Hardcover, \$23.95) — is to profoundly research the era, place, and personalities featured in his novels so that if there does happen to be any astounding, totally wacky real facts about any of these things or people lying about amid the real debris of history (which, of course, there always are, and in abundance), he will not only be aware of them, he will be able to make skillful use of them. Congratulations, Mr. Powers, says I, and if I were not so lazy, I would do the same.

*Expiration Date* presents a well-thought-out and solidly constructed fantastic version of Los Angeles, which

Authors use Mercedes Lackey's poem "Lammas Night" as a springboard to write their own versions of the wizard's dilemma in a collection of magical stories. Art by Victoria Posyer.



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shows Powers has a deep and loving familiarity with the place and which, astoundingly, really *does* manage to be more bizarre than the actual Los Angeles! The novel is a ghost story that differs from the great bulk of ghost stories in that the ghosts (and a wide variety of other revenants — there are walk-

ing dead and various ingenious combinations of mortal flesh and ectoplasm) are the victims, not only because they are weaker and less well-mentally organized than the living, the living also find them edible and, if they eat enough of the poor things, downright addictive.

The living who have developed a taste for devouring the dead (the most convenient basic method for eating is to confine them in some sort of container and then inhale them up like a filmer version of cocaine) are voracious in their appetite and relentless in their pursuit. Since, in Powers' Los Angeles, ghosts are pathetic obsessives it is not at all hard to entrap them and run along the lines of one of the most supposedly reliable techniques employed for centuries in actual folk lore: If one scatters beans before one's doorway, ghosts, witches, vampires, and the like will have to pause and count them until the dawn's sun rises up and chases them away. Any little puzzle that basically cannot be resolved will do, and so a simple palindrome (Powers gives a slew of them throughout the book starting with SIT ON A POTATO PAN, OTS and GO HANG A SALAMI, I'M A LASAGNA HOG, both of which were new to me) or a bunch of jigsaw pieces too heavy for filmy phantom fingers to lift and fit together, will keep wistful specters hanging around helplessly until their entrapper arrives to snuff them on the spot or pop them into a test tube and cork them, so that they might be enjoyed leisurely at some future time or sold or traded on the busy, booming market in not-so-departed spirits.

The basic point-of-view character is a kid called Koot Parganas, child of a theosophically inclined mother and father. Plans to raise their son to be a living saint are vio-

## Books to Look For

**Blood of the Fold** by Terry Goodkind, Tor. This author burst on the field with *Wizard's First Rule* and continues to rule the bestseller lists with each new title. Find out why. His books are smart, fast-paced, and not the same old thing.

**Wind From a Foreign Sky** by Katya Reimann, Tor. This inventive first novel deals with those things you don't bring up at dinner — sex, religion, and politics. An auspicious debut.

**The Golden Compass** by Philip Pullman Knopf. Even before its publication this not-exactly-a-kid's-book has been garnering praise that most adult novels would pay millions for. A young girl in a magical court discovers that her fate is the fate of the world.

**The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror**, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, St. Martin's. Datlow handles the

horror, Windling the fantasy, and between the two of them they publish each year the most extensive and reliable guide to the field available.

**Sacrament** by Clive Barker, Harper Prism. Though fame and fortune has visited this author in spades, he has never reduced his commitment to ambitious storytelling and stylistic excellence. His work is beautiful, challenging, and unsettling.

**Feet of Clay** by Terry Pratchett, Harper Prism. From our experience with the author (who also takes responsibility for *Discworld*), this is just about guaranteed to be maniacally funny.

**The True Game** by Sheri S. Tepper, Berkley, \$15.00. One of the genres finest stylists sees her first three books reissued in a compendium volume. There are those who say that these three books began the D&D gaming craze.

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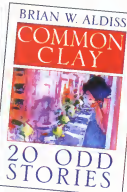
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nation of "A.O.P. dude." I enjoyed my stay with them all and hope you will do the same.

*The 37th Mandala* by Marc Laidlaw; St. Martin's Press, NY, 352 pp; Hardcover, \$23.95.

Ramsey Campbell is someone whose opinions I take very seriously — few living humans understand spookiness better — so when I saw his very favorable blurb on the book's dust jacket I did not hesitate to read it. I am very glad I did, as *The 37th Mandala* is a really spiffy little spooky thriller.

Campbell evokes the name of Lovecraft — and is right to do so — since

Laidlaw's story takes the same tack so often used by H.P.L., that of evoking the notion of a widespread underground network of very active players investigating and making dangerous use of dark and secret wisdom, ignored or completely unheard of by ordinary folks such as you and I, even though we are being, all unknowingly, tremendously affected by these hidden, highly sinister machinations.

The great difference between Lovecraft's era and our own, so far as knowledge of dark, uncanny forces is concerned, is that in his time solid information regarding such things was open to a very select few. The major grimoires were either left to molder on the secret, or at least highly restricted,

lently and permanently derailed when Koot's breaking open a bust of Dante (everything in Powers' fantastic L.A. is scrupulously logical by its rules) leads to the emergence of the ghost of none other than Thomas Alva Edison from years of confinement. There is a subsequent murder by torture of Koot's parent by one of Powers' many marvelously sinister villains (the book is packed with excellent fiends) determined to inhale and absorb the electrical genius' beleaguered spook.

I think my particular favorite among the characters may be Solomon Shadrow — an alias, as he is actually someone else, but you'll have to read the book to find out who. When we meet him Shadrow has been dead

for a considerable period of time and Powers' detailed developments of the challenges presented to someone finding him- or herself more or less living in a walking cadaver is a fine example of how much fun a writer and his or her readers can have when a simple fantasy premise is well-thought-through and gleefully developed.

There is, as they say, much, much more: a sort of living mask left by the great magician showman, Harry Houdini; a psychiatrist given to Santaria and excessive seances; a fiendish film producer and ghost devourer par excellence living aboard the permanently docked *Queen Mary*; something really nasty in a bag that will chase you through celebrity cemeteries, and the expla-

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shelves of a few major libraries and private collections. They sat there in their worm-eaten bindings, quietly molding, accessible only to highly specialized scholars or theologians who possessed the proper credentials. There were some very limited editions of translations brought out by eccentric types like Montague Summers, but these were hard to come by and cost a bundle if you found them.

There were societies that were devoted to the study and practice of this sort of thing and that made arcane manuscripts available to their membership once they had proven themselves capable of handling the information, but these societies were genuinely *secret*, no kidding around. If some associate violated his oaths and made the rites and sigils of these groups public knowledge, as Crowley and Regardie did with the Golden Dawn, it was a proper scandal. Such violators were condemned and ostracized and their revelations mocked and disowned.

Nowadays it's quite another matter. Volumes that used to be whispered legends are currently so much in print that it is nothing to come across them in an ordinary bookstore. I have seen tomes previously available only from catacombed niches of the Vatican offered for sale on revolving paperback racks in bus stations and corner cigar stores. And if the student is at all serious, a plethora of shops and publishers specialize in, and do very well with, the selling of grimoires poor old Lovecraft himself never had a chance of dipping into, much as he'd have enjoyed to, I'm sure. The great, overriding irony of all this is that these works, once so feared and dreaded that they were banned the whole world over, are now as blandly sold and bought as are cookbooks or romance novels. If these hoary objects own only a tiny fraction, just the most minuscule atom, of the appalling powers once attributed to them — I have found myself idly wondering more than once — then our casual commercialism of them may be steadily unleashing highly dangerous forces upon our heads!

And that is a thought that has clearly crossed the mind of Marc Laidlaw, since the core notion of *The 37th Mandala* is the potential risk attendant on our contemporary wide exposure and vast commercial exploitation of sorcerous secrets.

Laidlaw's anti-hero is a nicely realized tacky author of occult books, Derek Crowe, who, after an entirely mediocre career of cranking out third-rate, mostly cribbed books on how to develop one's psychic powers and magically achieve happiness, wealth, and popularity with the opposite sex, blunders into an association with the eccentric recluse and magus, Elias Mooney who — in his innocence of worldly matters — takes Crowe to be another sincere student and who — through the powers granted him by his astral insights — understands full well Crowe is a much more complicated creature than Crowe, himself, has ever dreamed.



Through a series of events best left to the book to describe, Crowe absconds with and disastrously perverts an elaborately illustrated text by Mooney which instructs the reader how to contact and summon the diverse members of a horrendous race of mandala-shaped creatures who regard our species about as tenderly and considerately as we regard shad roe; once they have us they use us brutally until we bust and then they eat us. Mooney's original version of the book is honest as to the creature's intentions; Crowe's is sweetened radically for the New Age palate and Laidlaw has hit upon the amusing device of sprinkling a quote from each version compared throughout his novel as the plot advances and darkens. An example:

*In us all is shattered and twisted. And never forget that we hold you in our jaws.*

—from *The Mandala Rites* of Elias Mooney

*In us all is rapture and bliss. And never forget we hold you in our hearts.*

—from *The Mandala Rites* of Derek Crowe

Of course the release of the cynical Crowe's wildly misleading version leads a quantity of students and groupies into a good deal of trouble. The ones most closely followed during the course of this tale are Michael Penzler, a sincere and well-intentioned practitioner of necromancy who, as it seems to be with many students of such arts, blithely dismisses all notions that the astral might not be inhabited exclusively by benign and kindly beings and that — life probably being what it is on whatever number of planes of existence it may exist — some of them might logically be expected to be at least as vicious as ourselves.

Fortunately for Penzler, he is really not a very good magician and so his efforts with the book only lead him into variously harmless mental buzzes. His bad luck starts when he finally manages to get his wife, Lenore, who has previously been totally indifferent to his researches in the mantic arts, to participate in a little ceremony. Once she does the Mandalas arrive, the horses are off, and poor Penzler discovers the varied challenges and pitfalls involved in magic for real.

As the tale rolls along — and it is a highly entertaining read from start to finish — a wide variety of other characters show up, all with different reasons to be deeply interested in the sinister Mandalas, most of them with conflicting views as to what the Mandalas are and what is the best use to which they can be put.

The most brutal of the bunch is, without doubt, Chhith, otherwise known as Huron, the hideously scarred, one-eared torturer of Tuol Sleng who, during his time of service with the Khmer Rouge as head interrogator and mutilator of multitudes of hapless prisoners, came to be aware of the Mandalas and their powers and decided he wanted them

# Poetry Contest \$24,000 in Prizes

*The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes to amateur poets in coming months*

Owings Mills, Maryland — The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$24,000 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

"We're especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets," indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry. "We have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition."

## How To Enter

Anyone may enter the competition simply by sending in ONLY ONE original poem, any subject, any style to:

The National Library of Poetry  
11419 Cronridge Drive  
PO Box 704-1755  
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The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "Each poem received will be acknowledged, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely. Every poet who enters will receive an evaluation of their artistry.



*The Coming of Dawn, featured above, is one of The National Library of Poetry's recent deluxe hardbound anthologies.*

## World's Largest Poetry Organization

Having awarded over \$90,000 in prizes to over 5,000 poets worldwide in recent years, The National Library of Poetry, founded in 1982 to promote the artistic accomplishments of contemporary poets, is the largest organization of its kind in the world. Anthologies published by the organization have featured poems by more than 100,000 poets. "Our anthologies routinely sell out because they are truly enjoyable reading, and they are also a sought-after sourcebook for poetic talent," said Mr. Ely.

"We're always looking for new poetic talent," he added. "I hope you urge your readers to enter the contest. There is absolutely no obligation whatsoever, and they could be our next big winner."

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all for his own.

The most sinister are surely Etienne and Nina, a charming couple who would probably find it child's play to get you to trust them completely. They appear to be capable of any villainy which will serve their masters, the Mandalas, and I would strongly advise you to avoid them completely. Except in this book, of course.

*Common Clay: 20 Odd Stories*, by Brian W. Aldiss; St. Martin's Press, NY; 334 pp.; Hardcover; \$24.95.

Finally, and most heartily, I strongly recommend you read *Common Clay*. Aldiss is one of the best writers of fantasy/reality (really good fantasy is, of course, the clearest possible look we can take at reality; we only call it fantasy to make it bearable) now going and has been for the past several decades. I cannot imagine a better guide for you if you really and truly want to explore "realms of fantasy."

The stories in the book, together with explanatory or ruminative essays about them, or their themes, or how they came to be, are simply marvelous. Their range is amazing, going from the gentlest tenderness to the most appalling brutality, and if you read the book through from its first page to its last you will be wrung out like a 500-year-old washcloth and — I swear it — a wiser and better human. And that's the first time I've made that claim for any book.

*Common Clay* is basically all about wisdom (a quality in such breathtakingly short shrift these days and one so ill-valued by any society I've been in lately, that one must reluctantly come to the conclusion that it is, by and large, actually hated, both by the powers that be and by the hapless suckers those powers so blatantly and unblushingly push around).

Just to make sure you're awake, Aldiss starts off with the title story, which is about art and artists. It starts gently enough, drifts you into confusing waters, then delivers a belly punch at the end the likes of which I haven't had delivered to me since ... I can't think when. The thing is absolutely devastating. The second story is grimness itself; the third a kind of Zen koan with the mantra: "Don't you value your life?" (Do you?); the fourth and fifth are little gems of science fiction art that would be enough to make a lesser writer rest upon his or her laurels for the rest of their career; and the sixth is not a story at all, but an essay proving to my entire and lasting satisfaction that Hamlet was such a sorehead because he was overweight and on a diet that wasn't working ("O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt...") and so it goes.

I am loathe to pick a favorite because if you got hold of this book and just read a couple of stories in it, you'd be making a terrible mistake but, right now, at this moment, "The God Who Slept With Women" seems to be haunting me in particular, and I must admit "Horse Meat," inspired by a strange revelation of Aldous Huxley's about Cardinal

*Continued on page 29*

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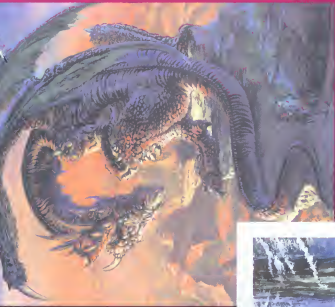
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## The Making of a Myth: Rob Cohen and Phil Tippett on *Dragonheart*.

WHEN HE BEGAN TO ENVISION DRAGO, THE MYTHICAL, EPONYMOUS CO-STAR OF *Dragonheart*, director Rob Cohen (*Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*) wanted to get away from Western ideas of dragons as villainous monsters. "What I was concerned about," Cohen says, "was designing a dragon that was unlike people's expectations. I started with the Fu dog design, because having worked on

*Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, I've been very influenced by Asian culture. In Asian culture, the dragon is revered and thought of as a symbol of masculinity, courage, and godliness. The seat that the emperor sits on is called the dragon throne, and all of the emperor of China's seals were dragon seals. I wanted to draw inspiration from a culture that revered the dragon instead of Western culture which has stories more like St. George and the dragon, where he kills the hell-spawn. We took the Fu dog, which is the lion dog of Asian culture, and mixed it with elements of dinosaurs, so it had the power and the scale, and made it a flying quadruped."

Working from this springboard, Cohen and Oscar-winning effects expert Phil Tippett (*Jurassic Park*) created Drago, an 18-foot-high, 43-foot-long, computer-generated dragon with a 75-foot wingspan and a voice provided by Sean Connery. Tippett's instructions to the Industrial Light and Magic effects team (headed by visual effects supervisor Scott Squires) spelled out the challenge. "Look," Tippett said, "what you people have done and done well in *Jurassic* is create movement of animals that God created, and that we had some sense of what they were. What you're going to do in *Dragonheart* is to take a creature that we've created and he's going to be like nothing that nature ever

gave you a template for. And you're going to make him act. We're going to struggle to get out the first CGI actor."

*Dragonheart* (due out from Universal on May 31) is the story of Bowen, an idealistic, chivalrous 10th-century knight played by Dennis Quaid (*Enemy Mine*). During a peasant uprising, Bowen's young charge, prince Einon (Lee Oakes), is grievously wounded. In desperation, Queen Aislinn (Julie Christie) brings her dying son to a dragon's cave and implores the creature to save him. After the prince swears to rule with mercy and justice, the dragon severs his own heart and gives half to Einon, healing him.

But the prince grows up to be a wicked despot (David Thewlis) and Bowen, believing the dragon's flesh has poisoned the prince, becomes an embittered, cynical dragonslayer. It is not until he encounters Drago in battle that Bowen must re-evaluate his life and his calling.

Cohen came to the project after Richard Donner (*Superman*) left, citing an inability to attract stars such as Mel Gibson or Harrison Ford (both of whom expressed initial interest in the film) to play Bowen. Cohen was attracted to Charles Edward Pogue's script because "I felt that it worked on many levels, which I'm always attracted to. I thought on the level of a great fantasy adventure film it worked just fine. On the level of an allegory it worked in terms of a story of good and evil, of being rewarded for doing the right thing, of having a moral code to live by, and what happens when you violate that code, and what happens when you readopt that code." In addition, Cohen notes, "it gave me a chance to delve head-first into the world of CGI special effects, which is something that, after *Jurassic Park*, I was completely fascinated with."

The script required numerous rewrites because Pogue's first "... vision was just too dark and too, shall we say,

BELOW: Bowen, the cynical dragonslayer (Dennis Quaid), encounters Drago in battle and discovers his career and his life need re-evaluation. RIGHT: Bowen allies himself with a comely peasant (Dina Meyer) and a quiet monk (Pete Postlethwaite).



# Thomas Canty



*"I am no more or less human than any of my fellows. I can be possessed as easily by love as by despair, by fear as by hatred. Yet it is my fate to fight*

*forever and to possess peace but briefly, for I am the Champion Eternal, at once defender of justice and its destroyer."*

*—Michael Moorcock  
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The idealistic knight Bowen, once dedicated to protecting his princely charge, finds himself crossing swords with the now grown-up evil despot Eimon (David Thewlis).

floridly literate. [Pogue] thinks of screenplays in the same form as theatrical plays, which is like 'the word is everything; the image is nothing.' And I tried to explain to him very gently that in this movie the image is at least as important as the words and maybe more, because the image of this dragon and what he is and how he appears and how he communicates and the degree to which I can achieve true emotionality, expression, and interaction, is going to be critical. And if what we've got is a lot of pseudo-Shakespearean kind of florid lines, it's going to keep the audience from adhering to these characters."

Dennis Quaid, while he had worked with Cohen before (on *Anatole* Night at the *Dixie Bar and Grill*) was not initially a contender for the role of Bowen. But he was interested in the role, and his agent contacted Cohen. "I thought, Jesus, he's so American: blond, blue-eyed — so 'the all-American boy,'" Cohen says. "I dunno if he can pull off this thing, but let's meet him. He came in and he started telling producer Rafaella De Laurentiis and me why he loved the script, and how he felt about the character of Bowen, and when he left the office, I turned to her and I said, 'You know, that was a very Knight of the Old Code thing to do.' Most actors today basically say, 'If you don't offer me a firm offer of, say, X million dollars, I won't even read the script.' Here's a guy who came in just out of passion."

Cohen was impressed. "I started thinking about what I could do to remove him from the California/Texas surfer boy look with facial hair, costuming, and so on. Eventually, in reviewing all his films, including *Enemy Mine*, I saw his strengths and I saw where things had gone wrong, and I felt that he would be a very good choice for us, because he's a very fine actor. He does comedy well and drama well, which is a very hard thing to find in our business. Harrison Ford is another one who has that ability. Mel has that ability, but very few other leading men can do both."

This ability came in handy during a humorous sequence in which Bowen and

Draco actually band together for a sort of 10th-century confidence game. "Draco's tired of hiding, and tired of being chased by other dragonslayers, and Bowen is down on his luck so that the dragon gives him a choice after [they do] battle: 'Ultimately I can either kill you or you can join forces with me.' And they decide to set up a scam thing so that the dragon terrorizes some noble's fiefdom, but Bowen rides in and says 'I can take care of that dragon for you for a fee.' They pay him the fee and then [Bowen and Draco] have this scam to make it look like Bowen has killed the dragon, but the dragon gets away and Bowen gets away. That works for a while, but then they both realize they're betraying their moral code."

The film was shot on location in Slovakia, near Hungary, at various sites, including castles, forests, caves, and an abandoned quarry where the crew constructed a 30-foot-high waterfall and a 250-foot-diameter lake. One location, in the hamlet of Zilina, featured the castle where Countess Elizabeth Bathory reportedly tortured young girls and bathed in their blood. Interiors were filmed at the capital city of Bratislava, which featured a modern film studio and facilities. Aerial shots destined to provide both POV shots and background plates for Draco's flight were accomplished by mounting a Vistavision camera set up on a microlight plane.

To create Draco in the computer, Cohen was determined to do an even more impressive job than had been done in *Jurassic Park*. "He's got 20,000 more nodes (computerized axes of movement) than the *T. rex*. So he's got more ripply skin, more detail, more everything than they were able to do. I think *T. rex* had 17,000 and Draco has 40,000. You're going to watch hand gestures, eye movement, mouth lip-sync, expressions, facial changes, body attitude — he flies, he swims, he shoots three different kinds of fire. He's got an arsenal of body abilities that he uses: His tail changes shape when he wants to fight and when he's relaxed. I tried to reinvent the mythology of dragons."



With Draco possessing such amazing abilities, how will the audience maintain its suspension of disbelief? "With something like this," says Phil Tippett, "you're kind of in the world of archetypes. Draco had to meet audience expectations of a dragon. So it's not going to be so utterly phantasmagorical that you're going to be utterly blown away by its detail and its filigree. It has some kind of palpable reality to it. Once you've achieved that, I think it just sits right. It's not dazzling, it just feels like it's a plausible living thing."

Coordinating unusual or difficult shots was a big challenge, according to Cohen. "If you're going to have the dragon swim underwater like an amphibian, I had this idea: Well maybe he should have membranous eye coverings like a frog. It was like 'How to work that out?' — how to make the technology stretch to accommodate these new ideas? It was much more important to me to make the technology push the outer edge than them tell me, 'You couldn't do this.'"

"We've got shots in there, because I craned around the dragon and kept the shot in constant motion, which means constant perspective changes, and the fact that Dennis Quaid is interacting in front of the dragon, which means constant rotoscoping, and so on — we've got shots in there where one shot costs \$400,000. However, this is really an exciting thing because you're watching a one-shot, two-page dialogue scene between the thing that wasn't there and a man, and they're interacting: touching in the same frame and the camera never cuts."

With such a marvelous creature as Draco at the center of the movie, Cohen was also faced with the task of balancing out the human side of the film. "Because it's such a good story, and because [Draco's] so integrated into it, it's not just about 'here's a new dragon effect — isn't that wonderful?' It's a really involved tale, and the humans in the tale, whether they be a villain like David Thewlis, who won Best Actor at Cannes, or Julie Christie (who plays his mother), who hasn't been seen in an American film in twenty years, and is an Academy Award-winner, or Pete Postlethwaite, who was nominated for Best Actor for *In the Name of the Father*, who plays the monk, or Dennis or any of them — there are levels and levels and levels of human interaction in which the dragon is both reflected and also involved. So that you're never looking at two movies; it's never like *Jurassic* where you're with the dinosaurs doing something or you're sitting in a kitchen with people eating ice cream and talking about science. I'm not putting down *Jurassic*, God knows — we should only do half as well."

"This is a story that holds up on its own, in which you've got a really involved tale of human beings and their choices and a time and a description of a century and a very complicated plot. So when you're not with Draco and Bowen, you're definitely with a very tightening, involving, complex plot. The balance is pretty good." ■

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## Hounds, Hares and Standing Stones: The Lore of England's West Country.

THE LEGENDS OF EUROPE AND AMERICA ARE ALL VERY INTERESTING," WROTE ONE *Realms of Fantasy* reader, "but I'd like to know more about the part of England where you live. I am waiting for a column about Devon."

Devon, for those unfamiliar with England, is a county of farmland, woodland, and moor on the far southwestern tip of the island, just south of Wales, bordered by Somerset, Cornwall, and the roaring sea. Devonshire is part of the West Country, a region of Britain with its own legends, folkways, songs, and dialects. Cornwall, the westernmost part of the region, has an entire language of its own — not as well preserved as that of Wales, and yet not entirely extinguished. From the rugged coast come stories of mermaids, smuggler's ghosts, and sunken cities. From the woods come tales of faeries, goblins, red deer, and white undines. The empty expanses of Exmoor and Dartmoor are beautiful, bleak, and mysterious — vast hills where sheep and wild ponies graze among the standing stones.

Brian Froud says "I always feel that trees are alive, crouching, waiting to get up and do something. Often one can't see the giant for the wood, especially in Devon where trees seldom stand alone, but intertwine making a community of trees."



Small villages sit on the cliffs of the coast or are tucked into farmland surrounding the moor. The Green Man, a symbol of pagan tree worship, is carved into country churches of stone, as are Tinner Rabbits: a circular carving of three hares joined together at the ears. This is the alchemical symbol of the old tin miners who worked on the moor long ago — but it is also a symbol of the Triple Goddess whose power (like the Cornish language) has never entirely died out here. The West Country is a place where old ways and beliefs coexist with the modern present: where people hook up to the Internet from 300-year-old cottages, and drive Land Rovers to local pubs where their great-great-grandfathers once drank, and lace on Gortex walking boots to hike out to Bronze-Age ruins. I first set foot in this part of England just over fifteen years ago. It was like stepping into the sepia-tinted fields of an Arthur Rackham painting. It was like reaching the end of a long journey and finding I'd come back home.

**Journal, April 19.** I've made the crossing once again from the desert [my winter retreat in Arizona] to the green, wet, oak-crowned hills of Devon. Or rather, my body woke up here this morning; my soul is still somewhere over the Atlantic and it hasn't quite caught up with me yet. I woke still expecting warmth and sunshine and coyotes howling from blue mountain slopes — instead there was mist, wood smoke, velvet, and the cottage's apple-and-lavender scent. A fire is lit in the big stone hearth to warm these thick 16th-century walls; the smoke rises up the chimney, past the roof of thatch, to a pearl-white sky. Both cottage and cat seem glad that I'm back. The books and art supplies on the shelves look cozy, familiar, eager to be of use. Peace settles on these crooked old rooms as thick as the dust on wood plank floors. The goblins grin on the kitchen walls [painted there by neighbors Brian Froud and Alan Lee]; the deer maiden in the garden [by sculptor Wendy Froud] has weathered over the winter months and stands half-buried in ivy now. The roses are budding already, and the rowan trees are bright with new leaves. My desk is piled with mail and manuscripts, all marked with rows of muddy cat prints. The howling coyotes are a universe away. I took to harp music....

Dartmoor is an archaeological treasure trove, containing one of the largest concentrations of prehistoric monuments to be found in England. The standing stones on Stall Moor alone extend in a row over two miles long; elsewhere on the moor are double and triple rows, stone circles, menhirs, ancient burial kists, and Bronze-Age vil-

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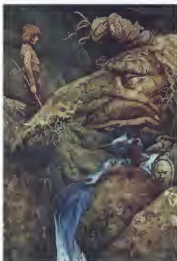
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lage ruins. The Nine Maidens circle of knee-high stones stands on an isolated hill above the village of Belstone. As in many circles, the weather-worn stones are considered to be feminine by nature; they take the shape of maidens and dance in a ring at every Hunter's Moon. The Scorhill and Grey Wethers circles are the largest to be found on Dartmoor. They say these stones get up, stretch, and take a stroll with the rise of the sun, shifting their places slightly each time they return to their places again. Even older than the stone circles is Spinsters' Rock, a neolithic dolmen made up of four huge granite slabs. According to legend, the dolmen was built by three women taking a break from their work — another reference to the Triple Goddess: maiden, mother, and crone. (A *spinsters* in this case was a spinner of wool, not an unmarried lady.)

All these ancient stones were set up for purposes we can only guess at now. In addition to those placed by human hands, the natural forces of wind, rain, and frost have carved the granite boulders of the region (called tors) into fantastical shapes. Vixen Tor and Lynx Tor are both stone formations with supernatural reputations, and legends advise against lingering in either site once the sun goes down. Ellen Steiber's children's book, *Fangs of Evil*, takes place among these giant stones. Steiber's tale of a young Devon girl draws upon a variety of local legends, including that of big, wild cats that are said



"The river has a voice," says Brian Froud.

to still roam the moors today.

Great Hound Tor is a beautiful rock formation with several legends attached. In one, a witch — in the shape of a hare — is chased by a local farmer and his dogs, until she tires of the sport and turns them all into stone. Other tales associate the hounds with the Wild Hunt of Celtic lore. The dogs are called Yeth Hounds in the stories that come from

Somerset, Wish or Whist (meaning "eerie") Hounds in the tales of old Dartmoor. The pack is led by Dewer the Huntsman — called the Horned Man in the oldest accounts. When storms rage across the moors, folks say the wild Huntsman is riding again. Some say it's faeries and piskies he hunts; other say he's out for human blood, or for the souls of unbaptized babes. To catch sight of the Huntsman's terrible hounds is to sicken and die within the year. The hounds are white, with red translucent ears and eyes red with flames. A farmer riding home from the Warren Inn, an alehouse on the moor, saw a dark man with a pack of dogs that glowed an eerie white in the mist. Drawing on his courage, he asked the man if he'd had good sport that day. The dark man laughed and threw the farmer a bundle, making a gift of the kill. The farmer shuddered and hurried home, the stranger's gift tucked under his arm. When he reached his door he unwrapped the bundle and found his own child, dead.

Wistman's Wood is an ancient, gnarled oak copse on the banks of the West Dart river. This is the traditional home of the spectral hounds, a wood haunted by the dead. Above the copse is the old Lych Way, known locally as the Path of the Dead, down which corpses of Dartmoor miners were carried for burial in Lydford. Wistman's Wood, the Path of the Dead, and the ruins of a prehistoric village nearby, are all reputed to be among the most haunted places in Britain. The ghosts of



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monks have been seen on the old Lych Way, and the baying of the Whist Hound pack is still reported by unnerved travelers. Related to the hounds is the Black Dog of Dartmoor that haunts the road by the Warren Inn, renowned for frightening tourists and for its partiality to beer. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle must have known these tales when he wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Near the thatched-roof farmhouse used in a modern filming of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is Jay's Grave, a simple stone by the side of the road near Great Hound Tor. Kitty Jay was a young 18th-century orphan sent to labor on a farm in Manaton. Seduced by one of the farmhands, she found herself pregnant and took her own life. Suicides were not allowed a proper churchyard burial and so Kitty Jay was buried at an isolated crossroads between three parishes. To this day, more than a hundred years later, there are always fresh flowers on the sad little grave. No one is ever seen putting them there.

A more cheerful legend concerns the rock-crowned hills close by my own small village. One of these hills rises steeply above the fields of the village Commons, a green swath of land where wild mares come down from the moor to give birth in the spring, and rabbits congregate at dawn, and neighbors walk their dogs at dusk. The hill was said to be bare of stone until King Arthur stood upon it and challenged the Devil to a hurling match. The Devil stood on a second hill, and quoits were hurtled back and forth. King Arthur won and the Devil, enraged, turned those great quoits into stone. The stone tor crowns the hill today, watching over our houses.

**Journal, June 22.** *On the moor today the air was cool and fresh, with a wind that tossed my hair, flapped my long plaid skirt behind me and carried the taste of the sea. Alec [Lewis, a painter] and I followed sheep paths through the bracken and the bogs. Jack the dog trotted far behind, and then dashed off to chase the black-faced sheep on the farthest hills. Alec called curt words in Welsh and the dog came back again, shamefaced. We walked throughout the afternoon, heading deeper and deeper into the moor, following Alec's compass in the direction of Little Hound Tor. When at last we reached the tor, towering over the heather hills, my breath was coming in ragged gasps, my cheeks were red from sun and wind. We sat in the shadows of the rock, sharing whiskey and a chocolate bar. Jack sat panting at my feet; even he was tired by the long walk.*

Next he led me up and over the hill to a haunting little circle of stones — standing silent, old as time in this wild and windy place. We sat inside it, resting again, passing a canteen back and forth, while wild ponies grazed outside and gave Jack wary looks. "A little different from Arizona," Alec teased in his Welshman's sing-song lilt.

"Oh, not at all," I tensed right back. "Just strip off the grass and it's exactly the same."

"Just strip off the grass and it's exactly the same!" Alec repeated, scandalized, hearing his beloved moorland compared to American desert. But in fact this wasn't so far from the truth, for

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although one is green and the other is brown, colored with palettes of different paints, they still have a spirit in common: a spirit of age, of vast and empty space, of wild land untamed.

Our long trail home again took us past the larger Scorhill stone circle, just as the evening mist began to rise and the light to fade. A group of young girls was climbing to Scorhill, carrying wood for a bonfire. "Local coven," Alice said over his shoulder as we passed. And this time I didn't know if the man was teasing me or not...

My neighbor, Brian Froud, has spent many years studying the myths, folk tales, and faery lore of Devon. This extraordinary painter has published several wonderful art books on the subject: *The Land of Froud*, *Goblins*, *Faeries* (co-created with Alan Lee) and, most recently, the humorous *Lady Cottingham's Pressed Fairy Book*. "In the faery realm," says Brian, "the spirits of dead ancestors co-exist with various faery races that are the inner guardians of our land. Some Welsh faeries were thought to be spirits of the old Druids. Our local Dartmoor pixies are said to be the diminishing souls of the prehistoric inhabitants. Wherever there is an ancient site you are sure to find the faeries. Being the guardians of the land, they have to be treated with respect. Long ago at Fernworthy, for instance, a farm was built that disturbed the dwelling place of some earth faeries, and they stole the farmer's newborn baby. There are many tales of poltergeist-type activity in houses built on faery paths. However, sometimes faeries can be helpful. The queen of faery herself is credited with the construction of South Down Bridge near Tavistock. She crystallized drops of water from a rainbow over the stream, and then transformed them into the huge boulders that form the bridge. Bridges are favorite haunts of the faeries. When we stand on a bridge, we stand neither on land nor water; we stand in a symbolic space. Faerie-land is always approached in places or moments where opposites are in balance. Edges, borders, boundaries of all kinds are where we encounter the faery realm. Where land and water meet, where forest begins, and in the twilight when the dark meets the light..."

The woods of Devon are deep and green with moss and ivy, holly and briars. In spring, bluebells make carpets of purple; in autumn, red berries are bright as red jewels. These woods are full of faery lore: tree faeries, earth faeries, and the spirits that haunt every river, spring, hollow, andcombe. "Dart, Dart, cruel Dart, every year thou claim'st a heart," is one local saying about the malevolent water spirit in the swift River Dart. Another old saying is: "Ellum do grieve, oak he do hate, willow do walk if you travels late." According to this tradition, the elm tree mourns if a neighboring elm is cut down, eventually dying of its grief; while an oak copse springs up from the roots of cut oak—a copse that will then be hostile to man. Willow trees are supposed to have the habit of walking late at night, following after

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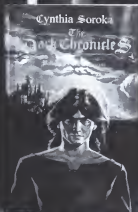
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travelers and muttering behind them.

Tolkien drew upon this tradition when he created Old Man Willow in *The Lord of the Rings*. Another neighbor of mine, Alan Lee, is the illustrator of the recent anniversary edition of Tolkien's masterwork, and many of our fine old Devon trees can be found in his paintings of Middle Earth. Much of Alan's own private artwork reflects his love of trees and their lore. Certain groves, he has pointed out, were once the holy places of this land. Oak trees in particular were sacred to Druids and other ancient peoples. Some folks still believe it is wise to ask permission to enter an old oak wood. (See the Folkroots column in *Rebonds of Fantasy* Issue #1 for more on the legends of the forest.)

**Journal, August 10.** I walked the long path by the river, then climbed through trees and up stone steps to reach the narrow path above, winding along the edge of the gorge as the river flowed silent below. I crossed over the castle grounds, and through the lanes to the village nearby. The pub at its center was crowded tonight. Friends and neighbors spilled from its low, smokey rooms and out to the cool night air. Someone bought me a beer, I'm not even sure who, as I followed the sound of the music inside. Two fiddles, a squeeze-box, a mandolin, pipe and tabor, a tweed-suited farmer on bass. An old man sang a song in a Devon dialect so thick I could not understand. Farmers, builders, artists, and young hippie travelers crowded into the pub's ancient rooms. Dogs and children crawled underfoot. The room smelled of ale, cigarettes, and wood smoke. I closed my eyes, transported back into time by the old tunes....

Music is one way that the old folk tradition remains a part of West Country life. Only a few believe in faeries now, or at least will admit to such beliefs—but harpists still play *The Fairy's Love Song*, fiddlers still play *The Faery Reel*, singers still sing the old ballads of elfin lovers and midnight ghosts, of women seduced and men bewitched. Brian Froud notes: "Folklore from the Devon countryside is full of faery music and dances, and humans lured out into the dark of night by tunes both strange and compelling. In fact, the faeries could be so troublesome with their dancing that local farmwives took to marking little crosses on top of their cakes to prevent the dancing shoes of faery creatures from puncturing the dough."

"According to legend, mortal musicians would sometimes overhear beautiful faery music while sitting close to faery hills or while secretly watching the faeries dance. Faery tunes then entered our folk music heritage and became so intermingled with our own that only a few still bear names like *The Fairy's Waltz* or *The Faery Reel* to indicate their true lineage."

Charles de Lint, a Canadian musician of Celtic folk music, as well as a scholar of mythic lore, has written a West Country fantasy novel set over the border in Cornwall. De Lint's book, *The Little Country*, is filled with the music and magic sunk deep into West Country soil. The novel reaches from

contemporary times into the land's legendary past. You might also look out for *King Orfeo*, part of the *Ballads and Sagas* series of comic books by artist Charles Vess based on magical British ballads. This old folk song, retold as a graphic story set among West County musicians, is available from Charles Vess's own company. (For information on the series, write: Green Man Press, 10518 Rich Valley Rd., Bristol, VA. 24202.)

For traditional stories of West Country lore, I recommend the following books: *The Witchcraft & Folklore of Dartmoor* by Ruth E. St. Leger-Gordon; *The Forest of Dartmoor* by Hugu Breton; *Songs of the West* by Baring Gould; *The Folklore of Somerset* by Kingsley Palmer; *British Fairy Origins* by Lewis Spence; *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* by W.Y. Evans Wentz; *The Vanishing People* by Katherine Briggs; Allison Uttley's story "The Girl Who Married a Pixie" in Uttley's *Fairy Tales*; and particularly *The Land of Froud* by Brian Froud; and *Faeries by Brian Froud and Alan Lee*. In *We See Devon*, Val Doore writes: "The moor is elemental. The thin veneer of civilization has never been spread over it. Its landscape and weather alike go back to the simple uncompounded elements of the world, stark, natural and lovely." West Country lore, like the land itself, is stark, natural, and lovely indeed. The landscape is haunted and rich with story.

**Journal, September 11.** Ellen [Kushner, a fantasy writer] has come to stay in Devon this week. Yesterday Wendy [Froud] and I took her walking up on the moor. The mist hung heavy on the hills, wrapping the world in pale gray silk, as we followed sheep over a rise and down the slope to Scorhill. The ancient circle of standing stones held silence in their center; I stepped between two portal stones and the silence closed around me. We stood among the ancient rocks, among purple heather and yellow gorse and bracken turning from green to brown, three women lost in our private thoughts, prayers, and meditations. I prayed for strength in the coming weeks, for health, courage, creative inspiration.... I prayed for the strength that all women have, that ability to endure, to carry on, to create life out of darkness, to spin gold from straw.

After a while I sat down beside Wendy, leaning my back against a tall stone. Ellen came to sit beside us, silent, her expression grave. Wendy said, "It feels very... healing... up here today. Some days it's not so benevolent. Other days I feel nothing at all."

I said, "I feel poised at some new beginning, some new phase in all of our lives. As though one chapter has ended, and another is about to start."

We rose and walked to the river, where water danced between bleached stones. The mist shut out the rest of the world. There were no villages beyond the moor, no cities, no London, no Boston, no New York. There were only tall hills and humble stone and deep water and three women, the *Three Graces*, the *Three Fates*, dark and light and golden. The three hares of that ancient trickster. The *Triple Goddess*, whose seasons of life were the long moorland path that we followed....

## BOOKS

Continued from page 16

Richelieu, must surely be one of the cruelest  
*conte cruels* ever penned.

Gahan Wilson

*Lammas Night*, created by Mercedes Lackey, edited by Josepha Sherman (Baen Books, NY, 288 pp., Paperback, \$5.99).

You may have had the experience, after reading a novel, seeing a movie, or watching a TV show, of being inspired to write something, or inspired simply to fantasize, playing in your head with the characters and universe someone else has created. The quality in a book or movie that inspires us to create is a very difficult thing to isolate. Certain authors — Harlan Ellison comes to mind — seem to infect us with the need to create. Certain movies — *Star Wars* — and TV series — *Star Trek* — have inspired record numbers of viewers to write. While some of these sources of inspiration are in themselves exceptional works of art, there are many great works of art that don't send us running to the computer. *E.T.*, for example, is a wonderful movie, but I know very few people who have written *E.T.*-inspired fiction (rip-offs don't count, since those are commercially inspired). And a flawed movie like *Buckaroo Banzai* has inspired a good many people. It seems to me that to inspire others to create, a work of art must have several qualities: It must have a certain energy and originality, intriguing characters we empathize with, and it must leave room within its universe for us to come in and play. *E.T.*, for all its energy and sympathetic characters, is a tightly controlled, perfectly complete story in itself. It does not encourage us to consider what happens to the characters after the movie ends, and does not leave a lot of mystery for us to explore. *Buckaroo Banzai* on the other hand, with its loose storytelling and unraveling plot threads, draws us in to try to make sense of it all, to write in missing scenes in our head, to figure out what that watermelon is for.

All this is in way of introduction to *Lammas Night*, an anthology made up entirely of works inspired by a poem of the same name written by Mercedes Lackey. The poem has all the characteristics just described. It is about a female wizard who settles in a village to take the place of the previous wizard, a man who died mysteriously. Living in the house of the previous wizard, she finds she is haunted by his presence and courted by him. When she looks up the spell to banish him, the page in the spell book turns by itself, to a spell that would reincarnate and restore him. She doesn't know if he is good or evil, if she can trust him or not. The poem ends as she is about to decide which spell to cast.

The poem clearly invites us as readers into its universe, to consider the decision the wizard faces and to decide how we would act.



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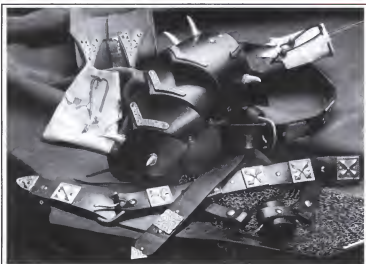


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Leaving us as she does at this crucial moment, Lackey gives us the urge to finish the poem, to resolve the situation. And indeed, the poem has inspired twenty writers to write short stories based on this situation, to explore the wizard's dilemma and the consequences of her decision.

Lackey herself provides one of these stories, "Hallowmas Night," basically a retelling of the poem that leaves us at the same decision-making point but fills the tale in with rich, evocative description. Lackey's description of the nature of magic, its flavors, textures, and colors, is as fascinating as her description of the dark powers the wizard must face is chilling.

S. M. Stirling and Jan Stirling create some wonderfully unexpected twists in their story, "The Mage, the Maiden and the Hag." The heroine of the story, the wizard Wythen, is far from your standard fantasy heroine: "Her nose resembled a generous wedge of cheese, below was a mouth like a slit cut into raw dough." Call me perverse, but I like seeing an ugly heroine for once. In the Stirlings' story, Wythen actually kills the male wizard, Narvik, so that she can take over his position in the town. But it is not her fault; she's possessed by the evil spirit of her former teacher, Navila. When Narvik begins to haunt Wythen, and when he presents her with the two spells between which she must choose, Navila rejoices that her chance at a full life has arrived. When Wythen casts the spell to reincarnate Narvik — which Navila is sure she will do, since Wythen is lonely and ugly and Narvik is a long-haired hunk — Navila will simply possess her for one instant to change the name she speaks from "Narvik" to "Navila." Then she will be restored. The evolving mysteries in the story keep us constantly surprised, and the story provides a terrific ending.

Laura Anne Gilman begins "The Road Taken," with the aftermath of the wizard's decision. She has decided to reincarnate the spirit, and he comes to her, a hunk (I like this book!) with no memory. The catch here is that the previous wizard, Aginard, was killed in an argument with someone else, who also died in the fight. These two spirits had both been haunting our heroine, and in casting her spell she has reincarnated both spirits in one body. Unless the two very different personalities can be combined into one, she and the town are in terrible danger from his violent fits. This story provides an interesting twist on the *Frankenstein* theme.

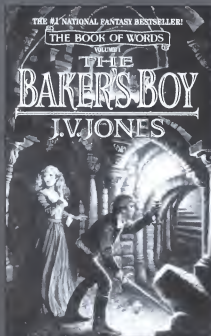
Additional stories by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Ellen Guon, Mark Shepherd, Holly Lisle, Elisabeth Waters, Doranna Durgin, and others provide different takes on this same basic premise, which is flexible enough to allow for a wide variety of stories that retain a feeling of freshness. But perhaps the most fun of reading *Lanterns Night* is to imagine which spell you would choose to cast, and to write your ending to this intriguing tale.

Jeanne Cavelos

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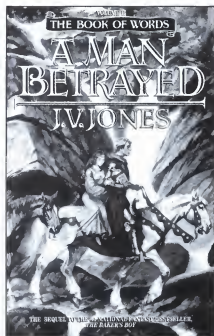
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*When the world was created, perhaps life was not in the game plan. Oh, well — as we all know, life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.*

# THE EMPEROR OF DREAMS

BY JAMES KILLUS  
*Illustration by Chuck Demerot*

**M**y friend was an author, reasonably well-known. You would probably recognize his name. He was a man of excellent taste but limited talent; no one knew this better than he. On other matters, his self-knowledge was less profound.

One evening shortly after his second (or maybe it was his third) divorce, he had me to his apartment for dinner. He was charming, as always, and we talked of many things, mostly having to do with the literature of fantasy. Sometime shortly after dessert, he told me of a story that he wished to write, about an all powerful sorcerer and a perfect world of his own creation ....

At dusk the clouds would dance for him.

First they gathered in icy wisps, to catch the last rays of the dying sun. Orange, then pale pink, then fiery neon were the colors that they showed as they massed and cavorted to his will. From feathery threads they gathered and became translucent sheets. Then they firmed and billowed and showed forms





suggestive and voluptuous. He felt a slow pulse of physical desire form within him and some of his maidens and succubi strove to kneel before his dark obsidian throne, to press his feet, stroke his thighs, run their lips over him. He smiled absently at the sensations and redevoted his attention to the airy spectacle.

The winds came. He liked the feel of the time of storm. The sun set, but no darkness fell, as sheet lightning took over the task of illumination. The cloud shapes tossed power back and forth among themselves, glowing with internal fires, allegory to his own, far greater power.

When the rains came he stood and walked naked to the edge of the parapet. This tower of his ebon castle stood upon the edge of a mile-high cliff that looked out over the western ocean. He smiled and breathed deeply of the salted air, the storm smells, the perfumes of the distant lands which he had created. He knew that this world was his and his alone and he saw that it was good. He smiled and almost laughed.

Then he lost interest. The storm ceased and he went inside.

HE COULD, IF HE SO DESIRED, REMEMBER OTHER TIMES, AND OTHER worlds, before he had come into the full measure of his power. In those times and places that had come before, there had been wills other than his own. There had been opposition in those days, wars and battles, strife, argument, and conflict. In his power he could have defeated all his enemies, but he wearied of such waste. So he had caused this world to form, and he had populated it with his creations. Thus he had withdrawn from the imperfect universe into a perfect world of his own devising.

He supposed himself to be the last of his race. While others of the sorcerer kings had grasped for stellar empires, he had contented himself with the creation of a unique and perfect planet. Others had wasted their energies in conquest and competition, arcane imaginings and ambitions of infinity. He had merely raised life up from the primordial ooze and molded it for his amusement.

In his early youth, before his selection, education, and apotheosis, he had taken a lover who later rejected him. By the time he came to his full power she was no doubt centuries dead. But it lay within his abilities to re-create her, down to the smallest amino acid, with all her memories accurate and complete up to the day of the rejection. He took her then, and corrupted her slowly, with drugs and sorcery, until she was the willing participant in unspeakable acts, copulations with demons, sadistic orgies involving the torture of innocents, the slow deaths of children. Then he returned her sanity and conscience to her, that she might appreciate her actions and all that she was capable of.

After her suicide he raised her once more from the dead, that she might understand that even her oblivion was his to grant or to deny. Then he returned her to her component elements, his vengeance satisfied.

Some of his peers had laid waste to worlds for small or imagined slights, committed genocides for tremors of emotion far less corrosive than love. He had some pride in his moderation.

His handmaidens dried his body as he entered his palace, and the damselfs slipped a soft robe over his shoulder. He crossed the gallery of singing crystals and climbed the feather staircase to the second tower of his keep. Here, dark engines gently hummed and spoke to each other of the energies that can bend the reality of a world to whim. Strange shadows flickered, lit by lamps that burned in chromatidies beyond narrow human perception. The space was filled with the smell of that strange blend of science and magic that his race alone had ever mastered.

If he so desired he could stop the world in its movement, or bend other natural laws to his command. So also could he slow time for himself. He could speed his own senses to such an extent that billowing flames became as statues frozen in the air. He could see to the heart of matter, past the mundane veil of the concrete. He could extend his vision beyond simple dimensionality to see creatures with neither substance nor soul.

In the center of the chamber was suspended a crystal globe, sim-

ulacrum to his created world. It matched this world in perfect fidelity, even to the existence of submicroscopic homunculi that lived in crystal cities upon its surface. Every blade of grass was known, every puff of air. Two details only were lacking: one, the crystal globe itself, since to include it would mean infinite regress, each successive globe requiring yet another within it. Such infinitude might flay the very universe itself. The other lack was, of course, that the globe contained no replicate of himself, for objective vision is denied to even gods.

He sank into a posture of meditation before the globe, and for a timeless span sent his mind adrift into the nether regions of arcana, where impossible questions coexist with nonsense answers, and where infinity lives, but seldom for long. He did this in lieu of sleep, since apotheosis negates such need. He was satisfied, and he contemplated his satisfaction and saw that it was good.

*I FIRST MET MY FRIEND AT A BOOK SIGNING DURING A FANTASY convention. Most of the people at our table were for him, of course; I had only a single book to my credit, and it had done well, but not massively so. The line in front of my friend-to-be stretched out of the room, some of the people in the line holding as many as a dozen books, excluding duplications.*

*One such person thrust a stack of my friend's works under his nose and said in admiration, "Whenever I think 'Sword and Sorcery' I think of you."*

*I muttered under my breath, "Funny, whenever I think of 'Sword and Sorcery,' I think of Fritz Leiber."*

*I hadn't meant him to hear, but a small smile crossed his lips. He whispered over at me, "When this is over, stick around. I think I'd like to talk to you."*

AFTER A TIME THAT WAS NEITHER LONG NOR SHORT, HE AROSE FROM his meditations, a look of annoyance upon his face. Something disturbed him, and that was a matter so unusual that he did not try to remember when it last occurred. He looked at the crystal globe and attuned his senses to it. What was ... ?

There. On a spot upon the continent that is the farthest distance to his palace. A small dark spot, too small to see, except with microscopic senses. Smaller than a ... what was it called? It took a moment to remember the word. Flyspeck.

Of course there were no flies upon his perfect world.

He reached out toward the crystal globe, then shook his head. No, he would go to visit the indicated spot, for no other reason than that it amused him to do so.

His trip was slow. He chose a whimsical mode of transportation, a carpet made of sunlight and spun dew, magicked that it might ride the wind. He chose to travel alone. Should he feel the desire for companionship, he could always transport a houri to him, or stop in one of the cities in which lived his created people. He had created such a wide variety of life.

Some of the hours he seldom called, those representing images of former unrequited desires, now long dust on whatever forgotten worlds that gave them birth. His sister twin, formed from a cell drawn from his own body, identical to him in taste and mood. Strange creatures of greater or lesser deformity, of mixed or indeterminate sex. He had experimented with many races, personalities, had tried his various desires upon them. In the fullness of his maturity he had become more prosaic in his tastes. As he himself had become less oriented to the physical, his desires and needs were more easily met.

Down below, life bubbled in his cities. He often went among them, invisibly, or in disguise. Occasionally he allowed them knowledge of him and he received their worship. More frequently he took a form which allowed him the brief partaking of the human drama. He smiled to himself. Perhaps after this journey he would again.

The passage over the eastern ocean was brief. His speed was not increased by impatience or any feeling of urgency, merely a sense of the rightness of it. He was sure of this. He did not wonder at the degree of his introspection.

On the eastern continent was a vast meadow, filled with grazing beasts and an occasional predator to feed upon them. His carpet

alint near one such carnivore, and he noted with satisfaction the frenzy of its hunt, the languor of its feeding. He had created all things very well.

The very last part of his journey he walked. He liked the feel of his legs moving toward a purpose, even if it was only curiosity that he served. Finally he looked down at the spot that had been so small and black upon his crystal globe.

It was not much. Just a small clump of grass. Slightly mottled, a little darker than the surrounding sod. But it was out of place. It looked more like jungle growth than grass of the savanna.

He reached, touched, drew back his hand. The feel of it was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but something deep within him found it disturbing. It was out of place.

With a flash of anger he reached down and tore it from the earth. He heard no scream as the roots pulled free. He crushed from it first life, then shape, then very existence. When he opened his hand no trace of it remained. His lips curled into a sneer.

His trip back to his palace was far swifter than his coming. That night he called as consort a succubus, with claws and fangs and burning skin. He felt the need of something which was close to pain. To remind himself of something he had forgotten.

WHEN THE DAWN OF the next morning shone upon the crystal globe, a new blotch had appeared, in the same place as the first, but larger. His anger blazed.

This time he did not choose to tarry nor to take his travel as leisure. His anger reached through his mighty sorcerous engines and warped the reality of his world to deposit him instantly at the antipodes. The last rays of the dying sun lit the clouds to the west.

The patch of aberrance had indeed regrown. He spat upon it and watched his venom eat into the outer mottled leaves. He called to his power and the flame rushed through him and the weedy patch exploded with his rage. The heat consumed everything within its grasp, and soon only a small scorched pit remained to mark its passing.

He stared into the pit for a very long time, with a feeling of incompleteness surrounding him. Then, as he watched, with infinite effrontery, the grass that hugged the edges of the pit began to twist and curl and change its hue. Soon, an annulus of the perverted growth had formed, its edges writhing in an outward search.

A little thrill of fear went through him, but he shrugged it off. He was unsure as to the nature of this thing before him. Obviously it was more complex than he had first imagined. He would consult his texts. His anger cooled, he again called upon his alchemical machines and he concocted a sphere of inverted time and placed it around the wild growth to contain it while he schemed.

Another warping and he was back within his keep.

His library was in the third tower of his palace, constructed of bone and enamel, and open to the air. His books and scrolls and talking gems were under spell, and impervious to decay. It gratified him to read in full view of the elements.

On the third day of his study, in the midst of a recondite derivation concerning the nature of life and metamorphosis, he heard a

moaning crash from the second tower of his demesne. Resisting the temptation to rush to investigate, he calmly arose and went to the edge of the balcony. He gathered a helping of wind within his cloak, allowing it to lift him across the distance to the other tower.

Inside, the crystal globe lay in shards upon the floor. He called up a golden mirror, a toy really, long unused. With a few whistled notes to direct it, it showed to him an image from the other side of his world. The sphere of inverted time still stood there, glowing faintly in the night. But where it touched the ground on one side there was a jagged gash in its spherical perfection, and through this maw poured an eruption of writhing green, like a river cutting through a sandstone wall.

It occurred to him that this growth was now in a straight line. And that it did not matter where the sphere was breached, that any straight line from the antipodes was a line aimed straight at him.

*I LISTENED TO THE TALE OF THE WILD GROWTH IN A PERFECT WORLD with that mild embarrassment that we feel when told of someone else's dreams, those dreams that are so revealing to everyone except the dreamer himself. I looked around me at the spotless apartment and wondered how many men become more tidy after a divorce. I also wondered how long the tidiness would last, given the tales that I'd also heard about my friend's recent professional and personal behavior.*

*"The only problem is," he said to me, "that I don't know how to end it. I need something really flashy, or maybe brilliantly clever. But so far I just have an escalating list of things that don't work."*

*"I would have thought that the ending was obvious," I told him.*

WHEN THE WILD GROWTH REACHED THE SHORES OF THE GREAT ocean, it stopped for a time in hesitation. He thought perhaps that this meant that it was landlocked, that it would be unable to cross the great waters. But soon the surface of the sea began to show a writhing mass of seaweed, and the unholy green began to advance once more. All sea life caught in the sargasso was trapped, to suffocate and die, and the stench of rotting fish arose and was carried on the wind to every corner of his world.

Now fully roused he called upon his powers. He sent storms upon it, to no effect. He raised volcanoes up into its path, yet the growth continued its advance. He sent unto it powerful ocean currents; he froze and boiled the sea; he called stray moonlets from the sky to crash upon it; he harried it with the solar wind.

Yet nothing stopped the implacable advance.

When it reached the farthest shore of the western continent, his people attacked it. They needed no commandment. Their fear matched his dismay at the sight of the terrible verdant. Though they fought the vegetation with fire and scythe, soon they too were engulfed, their cities overrun with the green, and the sounds of struggle within the twisted mass was terrible to hear.

RETIRING TO HIS MEDITATION CHAMBER, HE LOOSED HIS ASTRAL SELF. He had already discovered that his own farseeing would not penetrate into the green. His libraries were without use; no living text bore any word of this perverse, irresistible growth. So he sent his mind into the heavens, where still whispered the long dead memories of his race.

He conjured images of his departed compatriots and demanded their knowledge and imaginings. All stood silent when confronted with his tale. But when he banished them, there lingered for a flicker of time the image of his forgotten lover. She gazed upon him sadly and seemed to whisper a single word before sweet death again claimed her.

The word might have been *within*.

Pondering this, he sent his astral self deep into the core of his created world, to stalk the immense caverns filled with fire, the volcanic thanes, the crystal galleries, the dense and metamorphosed earth. And there he found a wandering chthonic spirit. And this did surprise him. For he had not created such a creature, nor had he thought to invite such a one to dwell in his created world.

*Continued on page 76*

*It has a good beat, but you definitely don't want to dance to it.*

# SPHINX SONG

The sphinx does not sing. You know that. It is a fact. She riddles, of course, and has since the days of Oedipus at least. And she's not bad at telling stories. But she does not sing.

Or so I thought.

I have been obsessed with the figure of the sphinx since I was a child. While other girls of my acquaintance played with dolls, I collected and played with sphinx figurines. In bone china, in unpainted metal, in wood. And — when I was old enough and rich enough to buy such things for myself — in gemstone, silver, ivory, and gold.

My therapist once suggested — very hesitatingly as he finds me a rather frightening figure — that I fancied the fact that the sphinx is a man-eater. He said that I wished I were the same. He suggested this at one evening session, and we had to end it early because I was laughing so hard as to become hysterical. Tears literally gushed from my eyes and I could not catch my breath. Man-

eater, indeed. Why I do not even particularly like men.

And — no — I cannot say present company excepted.

Now as you asked, it is incumbent upon me to tell you about my collection. It will explain many things: the locks, the barred doors, the alarms. This is a small town with hardly any crime to speak of. Yet I live in an armed fortress. I saw that you noticed this as you entered, but you were polite enough not to mention it. I have never known a chief inspector with such nice manners. You are to be complimented. But have patience. Soon all will be explained.

Some of the sphinxes in my collection I have had since childhood, and they are mostly the kind of tatty souvenirs

*Continued on next page*

BY JANE YOLEN  
*Illustration by Janet Aulisio*



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one can pick up in a quaint seaside shop. I keep them out of affection, remembrances of an ordinary but happy childhood, filled with visits to the Continent in the company of my dull but loving parents.

But one childhood piece, a dark and brooding wooden sphinx, I got on my first trip to Egypt with my Great Aunt Alice, after whom I am named. And it turns out that it is quite valuable, as I am sure you are aware. Great Aunt Alice was an archaeologist, quite used to spending summers sifting through the burning sands of ancient lands, and she was delighted with my obsession with the sphinx. It was she, in fact, who taught me the differences between the Egyptian and Greek sphinxes, between those of Assyria and those that stand watch in the halls of Karnak.

She had whisked me off one summer, right before holiday's end, to Gizeh where we spent two whole days in contemplation of that great Horus in the Horizon. Great Aunt Alice was an expert in the art of silence and I learned its power by her side. Except when I have visitors like yourself—not too often these days—I live my life in the kind of quiet that modern folks seem to equate with the tomb. But I believe those days in Gizeh, staring at the great limestone presence in the desert, were the most perfect times of my life.

The third day we haunted the local bazaars for just the right memento of my trip, and when I despaired of finding it and was ready to purchase anything just to get back to the hotel and a cool lemon drink, she cautioned me.

"It will speak to you, Allie," she said. "It will call your name."

And sure enough, late that afternoon, just as she had prophesied, in a dingy, airless shop whose only door was a series of strung beads, I found the sphinx I had been seeking.

"Al-lee," said a voice.

At first I thought it was Great Aunt Alice saying my name, but immediately realized my mistake. The voice was too low and foreign to be hers.

"Al-lee," the voice said again.

I followed the thread of sound to a great wooden table strewn with oddities that looked not second or even fifth hand, but as if generations of hands had discarded them.

"Al-lee," the throaty voice called for a third time.

I knelt down under the table and there, behind a box of broken toys, was the sphinx who I named at once: "She Who Must Be Answered."

Great Aunt Alice haggled for over twenty minutes with the shopkeeper, mostly for form's sake. He was a small Egyptian with skin the color of toffee and an uncouth manner that belied a truly avaricious heart. We got the sphinx for approximately £3.50.

She was made of a black wood that shone even under its coat of dust. Like the great limestone creature Aunt Alice and I had recently been contemplating, she had a lion's

body and the head of a pharaoh, the sort of sphinx Herodotus called "the man-sphinx." But I knew she was a female for all that. She fit comfortably in my hand but would not allow herself to be stroked familiarly, like some tame thing, like one of my minor china figurines. She was meant to be carried out like a queen, which was why I refused to let the shopkeeper wrap her up. Instead, I took off my blue silk hair ribbon and made a kind of royal nest of it, and she came back with all honor due her to our hotel, and thence home to Ealing. There she made that ordinary place a palace simply by her presence.

After that, of course, I could not bear to purchase any of those small, touristy figurines. They would not have been worthy companions for her. And thus began my growth in taste, a refinement of my natural obsession. The collection, as you know—having done your homework, as befits a man of your experience—now runs to well over five hundred pieces, and includes figures of the Karnak ram-headed sphinx as well as several gems from Persia carved with that powerful Assyrian winged bull. There are many early metal pieces as well, but my ivories are world famous. I suspect they are the reason you are here.

Before she died, Great Aunt Alice sent me one last sphinx from Greece. Carved from stone, she is a sphinx with the head and breasts of a woman. The stone of her breasts is spotted as if with a dusting of dark freckles. Her body is more doglike than lion, and she has bird wings delicately incised into the stone. Her tail is a serpent's and—alas—not as successfully wrought as the wings. But she is a queen in her own right. Next to the sphinx I got on that first trip with Great Aunt Alice, she is my favorite. Her name is "She Who Rides the Wind."

**I** HAVE NOT NAMED ALL OF MY sphinxes, not even the ones gotten in childhood. The names I give my special darlings are the ones they call themselves.

You must not think that I believe these figurines—of wood and wax, of metal and porcelain, of ivory and stone—speak out loud to me. Not at all. If I believed that, I would be mad. I am not mad. I am obsessed. There is a world of difference, as different as a sphinx from Egypt and a sphinx from Greece.

Occasionally I have been asked for the loan of my collection by one museum or another. I have always refused. You, of course, will assume it is because I am afraid that the museum security systems are lax. It is nothing of the sort. My ladies can take care of themselves. But I do not want silly holiday-trippers pointing and giggling at them. There is honor due. Even the ancients realized that.

A number of articles have been written about my collection, often slightly amusing

ones, poking fun at the eccentric Englishwoman who dabbles in odd and occult toys. The American magazine *The New Yorker* even wrote about me several years ago. It was meant to be humorous. It was not. Often the accompanying photographs in these articles emphasize the way my hair sometimes escapes its careful combs, or the flash makes my eyes behind their bifocals gleam with a kind of temporary madness. But I do not really mind. It is to the sphinxes that honor is due, not to me. I am merely the caretaker, the lady in waiting. I serve.

Besides, each time an article appears, I receive numerous letters from other sphinx admirers, and I issue careful invitations to them to visit my ladies. Only a few, though, ever come back.

But I digress. You are not interested in me. You are interested in my ladies. And their visitors. I began by telling you about the songs of the sphinx. The first time I heard one sing was a day much like this. Late summer—the hottest, we were told by the papers, since 1629. Or 1756. It depended which paper one believes. I take *The Guardian* of course. But this house is Edwardian, stone built, and so it was cool enough. I keep the curtains drawn during the day, the windows open at night. It suits me, who has spent so many years traveling under desert suns.

My visitor that day—self-invited—was a young American, an antiques dealer by trade. Quite well-known, or so he said. Americans are rather self-advertising as well, don't you think? He wore the latest in moustaches, which gripped the sides of his thin mouth like a pair of brackets around an equals sign. His clothes had a Wildean panache, especially a flowing cravat that was tied loosely around his neck. He did not seem to know what to do with his hands; they flopped and flapped about as he spoke. And he spoke incessantly. Besides, he was too acquisitive by half. I had not spent over half a century haggling in Middle Eastern souks not to recognize those glittering eyes.

"Did you know," he said, standing even closer to me than I was standing to him, "the Mohammedans so disfigured the Gizeh face, the pharaoh it represents cannot be identified with any certainty."

I stepped back from him and replied, "I know that is what the textbooks say." The coldness in my voice kept him from closing the distance between us again.

"They were such Philistines," he said, smiling and showing too much tooth. His hands fluttered wildly.

"Wrong country," I said, but he was not listening. Instead he had turned his back to me, focusing his entire gaze on *She Who Must Be Answered*. There was a sudden attentiveness in his body that I recognized.

"I'll give you 5,000 for it." He did not specify pounds or dollars, but of course it did not matter. She was not for sale. If she wanted me to, I would have given her to him for free. But



she did not find him either amusing or nice.

"It is a she," I said.

He giggled, assuming I was joking, but I never joke. And then he put his hand familiarly on her head. That was a mistake.

"Get out," I said, more a warning than a command. But he did not understand.

"Six-five," he said, still staring at her.

"She is not for sale."

"Everything is for sale," he said. "You only need to find the right price."

"Her price," I said with sudden certainty, "is the same as it has always been. The answer to her riddle."

He whipped around and stared at me, that smile fixed on his face. "What exactly do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. Answer her riddle, and she is yours."

His head went back and he laughed full out. For such a delicate man he had an enormous Adam's apple. It practically invited a bite. Then he stopped laughing and looked at me again. "That's an old one," he said. "The answer is Man."

I smiled at him without a bit of humor. "Wrong answer," I said. "She doesn't like men any more than I do." I turned on my heel and walked out of the room, locking the door behind me.

"Ten..." he called after me, but the rest of his offer was cut off in midfigure. There was an odd gurgling sound. Then a long silence.

And then the sphinx began to sing, her voice somewhere between a growl and an operatic bass. She sang in a dark rhythm that was much too complicated for me to count out, though I have played piano for years. It had a throbbing series of notes and words which I could not — even with my knowledge of Egyptian — begin to translate, but it sounded as if it were a song of victory.

I hurried back into the room, having trouble for a minute with the lock. The American gentleman was gone.

Quite gone.

I bagged up the metal zipper I found on the floor, along with several buttons and the metal eyelets from a pair of shoes. I wrapped them in the sports pages of *The Guardian*. I never read about sports. Then I put them in the bin. What the American gentleman forgot in his rush to have her was that She Who Must Be Answered is an Egyptian sphinx, not Greek. He never even waited to hear her question.

Since that time, there have been a full dozen gentlemen callers who have made that same mistake.

But I assume that you will be a bit less careless, Inspector. I certainly hope so. You have been very kind to an old lady who may only be a servant; but even for a servant, some honor is due.

Still, I must warn you: I never cried over the American. Or over the dozen other gentlemen who provoked the sphinx's song. And if you cannot answer my lady's riddle, I shall not cry over you, either. ☛

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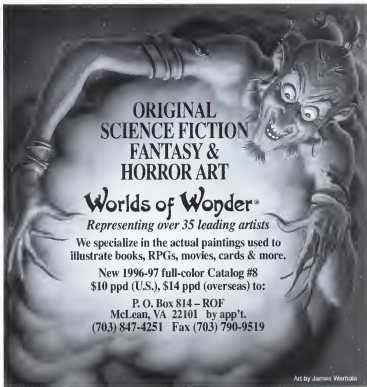
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*What ancient mysteries, what dark secrets  
lie beneath the dusty soil of  
once-great Babylon?*

# THE GOD AT MIDNIGHT

BY THOMAS E. FULLER  
AND BRAD STRICKLAND

*Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young*

THEY HOLD ME IN A CAGE WROUGHT OF SILVER  
and of living rose thorns.

The Shining One, whom men call Alexander, has brought me here from ruined Parsa, where King Darius quartered me in the Palace of a Thousand Columns, captive and kindred to the animals given him as tribute. To that king I was as his monoceros, as his tawny lion: a prize to display. To Alexander, I am more, much more. But there is no difference in me. The difference is in Alexander, unlike Darius as god is unlike mortal.

Babylon's night enfolds all, and from the flat crown of the ziggurat I hear only the light breath of the wind. Above my cage they have built a canopy, but the sides are open to the night. Before coming to this high place, never had I seen a city. My brief mortal life passed in a village beside the Nile, and the long count of floods after my Initiation and Transfiguration passed in tomblike darkness. Priestess and Oracle of Anubis, I abided in the temple hewn

from living stone near the First Cataract of the great river, where supplicants journeyed with questions and fears. I took from them blood and gave to them words of comfort, of warning, of mortal pains to come.

*Why could not I have foretold my own pain?*

At last, jealous of the jackal-headed god I served, the priests of Amon-Ra betrayed me, tore me from my temple, carried me in a sarcophagus bound in silver chains. When finally they released the chains I found myself in the menagerie of Darius, where his honored guests stared at me as if I were a crocodile or a camelopard. He may have thought he gave me pleasure when he thrust into my enclosure cowering slave boys or girls, my victims, my food.

Atop the ziggurat, I pace the boundaries of my newest cage. Corner to corner the count is thirty-six of my paces, though to the gods around me it would be but thirty, to the god Alexander perhaps only twenty-five. If I look out and up, I can see the stars.

*For hundreds of years I forgot stars existed. Now they burn far and cold, their light gleaming off the cruel silver, pointing the hungry thorns.*

Looking down, I see more stars, the ruddy color of fire, extending on all sides, orderly rows of amber and red sparks twinkling, gleaming. The cooking-fires of Babylon? Torches to light the paths of passersby? Oil lamps burning to ward away evil? Such simple uses, yet I cannot understand them. The priests and Initiates did not teach me the ways of men, but of gods. From god-haunted Egypt men took me, first to the mortal realm of Parsa, and now to this eminence, where still the gods haunt me, where anything seems possible, where I, even I, might do anything save die.

Footfalls on the stone steps of the flat-topped pyramid, the measured tread of the god Alexander. In a moment his mane of red hair will rise on the eastern side of the ziggurat, as the sun is rumored to rise above the eastern rim of the world.

*Once, when I lived, I dreamed. I believe I dreamed. No longer can I remember. We Initiates no longer have dreams, but live our nightmares.*

"Nedjmet." The god Alexander caresses the syllables of my name, causes me to shiver with agonizing longing, delicious pain, as I do if I stray too near the hooked thorns. "Are you well?"

I cannot look at him, for I know what will happen. "I am well, my lord." My voice — did it sound so tremulous in the days when from the feast of blood I read the future of the supplicants?

"We did everything as you bade, my lord." The voice of the broad, one-eyed man they call Antigonos Cyclops. "She will be comfortable here."

From the corner of my eye, I can see Alexander, an impossibly tall silhouette against the star-spattered night. Why did they not bring torches? Can gods see even in the dark? He comes closer, and I feel his heat, even through the heat-hungry links of silver. "Nedjmet." I cannot help shivering at the sound. "Nedjmet, will you feed?"

With my eyes averted, I search for a reply: "Thank you, no, my lord. We need not feed every night."

"I have much to learn about your kind, my Nedjmet." He moves, and I shift. "Why do you flee from me?"

"My lord, the priests taught me to honor gods — and to fear them."

His laughter is warm, sweet like thick honey. "Do you hear her,

*e*  
wishes the  
cage were not  
here, that he  
were free to  
trample me  
as a thing he  
dreads and  
fears. Anger  
sings in his  
blood, but fear  
murmurs there  
too, deep...

Antigonos? To half the world I am a god already. This child, they say, sees the future. Am I to believe her? Am I a god in fact as well as title?"

Antigonos does not reply. I feel his gaze upon me, as intent as the glare of a bull. He wishes the cage were not here, that he were free to trample me as a thing he dreads and fears. Anger sings in his blood, but fear murmurs there too, deep, close to the heart. At last he says heavily, "My lord, this child is more than five hundred years old."

"In five hundred years," Alexander replies, "a man might conquer many worlds." He stands silent for a time, and then turns abruptly. "I will have Nedjmet with me, not on this perch. You will see that she is moved — safely moved, Antigonos — to my palace. The eastern hall is large enough to accommodate this cage."

"Yes, my lord."

I feel his eyes on me, hot, like the kiss of two embers. "My Nedjmet. Do you wish for anything?"

"No, my lord," I say. "I wish for nothing."

He does not reply, but turns and leads Antigonos down the long eastern stairway. The Initiated cannot weep, but for all that night, I wait in my high cage, wishing for the one gift denied my kind forever.

*Wishing for Nothing.*

#### WITH BLOOD I DRANK KNOWLEDGE.

The copper taste told me that this supplicant would die a beggar, blind in a far country, after an unlucky time as a soldier; another would breathe his last on purple cushions, children and wives beside him. Some supplicants left with tears of gratitude, some with tears of anger. And in the dark intervals, resting on my bed of Egyptian soil, alone I saw — other things.

*Perhaps one does not need to drink the blood of a god to see the procession of the gods.*

Anubis visited me in the whispering darkness, breathed words in my ear so terrible that no child of mortal might hear them and remain whole of mind. I was no child of mortal, but one of the Transfigured, an Initiate. In those days the throng of worshipers brought life to me with their blood, for in drinking I learned: Sipping the life of a far-ranging sea captain, I became the captain, traveled the Great Ocean with him, heard strange tongues cry out in mystic ports. Feasting at the fountain of a dowager's throat, I knew the pleasures a dozen lovers had brought to her withered heart. I learned dark things, secret things. I was the tomb where men and women buried their fears, their hatreds, their doubts.

And yet none of this, vivid as it felt, was real. In those days, deep in the hollowed depths of stone, I felt free, an illusion borne of mere variety. The Temple was my cage, and darkness held me as surely as the hateful silver and rose hold me now. Never was I truly free, save only in the echoing blackness when Anubis the Jackal-Headed descended to me, told me terrible and wonderful things. We cannot see in the dark, no matter what mortals believe, but in the darkness such visions came! Like figures in a frieze, gods passed before me, each solemn and great, each distant and unknowable. Mortals think they can beseech the concern and care of a god, but a god cares nothing for any mortal, not even those who burn hecatombs of sacrifice. To a sincere and prayerful worshiper, a god might just as easily deal destruction as blessing, death as easily as life.

*At my Transfiguration a priest said I would be as a god. I am glad I am not a god. Their hearts must be so hollow that they ache unendingly.*

They moved me. I do not understand how my cage could be taken from that height and rebuilt in Alexander's palace in only one day, but gods can work wonders, they say. When night came and I emerged from my rest, it was as though the world had shifted around me: Instead of an airy height open to the stars, I now lived in a vast curtained hall, hangings of rich purple stirring slowly all around, as if I had been swallowed by a vast beast and could see the quivering of its vitals.

The floor of my cage is soil, not the soil of Egypt, but the earth most suited to the vile roses. Beneath that, felt thinly through the soles of my feet, are lattices of silver, poisonous to my kind. Around me, though, the vast floor is a mosaic made from multicolored marble: beasts of the sea, the land, the sky cunningly imitated.

Once again I am part of a menagerie.

He comes with the night. The hall is so huge that I can watch his approach until he is twenty paces away, and then his heat grows and I must turn away. He is far taller than any man I have ever seen, and he moves with more grace than a Libyan lion, muscles almost humming beneath his skin. He wears a short white tunic, a simple scarlet cape, and sandals of some golden stuff. I see this before his image begins to burn my eyes.

"And is not this more comfortable, Nedjmet?" he asks without greeting. Gods do not greet; they manifest.

With bowed head, I reply, "It is as your lordship wills it."

"But look. See what I have caused to be done for you." He moves to a wall hung with purple and sweeps aside the hanging. Past him, past a column, I see a garden, wondrous green, with a fountain, flowering plants, benches of stone, all wavering in the light of torches. "A private bower, my Nedjmet. Could I trust you to walk there with me? Could I free you from your cage?"

I tremble.

"Not yet, perhaps." He lets fall the curtain and it sways, brushing the marble floor, touching the blue image of an octopus. "One day, my Nedjmet, you and I shall walk there. Or one night. For we want no sun, do we?"

I see a ripple in the curtains, beyond the place where Alexander lifted them. He does not deign to notice, although a god knows all, and so I call no attention to the unseen presence of Antigonos, although even through the heavy cloth I hear his blood singing its song of loathing and fear.

Alexander stands, feet apart, arms folded across his breast. "You were a priestess," he says.

"I am a priestess, my lord."

"Tell me of your life as a priestess."

He is trying to put me at ease, for a god knows all he wishes to know. In stumbling words, I speak of Anubis, the Lord of the Dead, and of his power to curse or to bless mortal kind. He listens gravely, not interrupting. Emboldened, I mention the flood of supplicants, their hunger for knowledge, their joy or despair when their ache to know is fulfilled.

"So it is true," he says at last. "You can foresee the future."

"The paths of destiny are a tangled maze, my lord," I say. "A man may tread many ways through the labyrinth of his life, until the day comes when he learns of the one his feet are then treading. Then all doors close, all turnings disappear. From that day forth, the man has only one possible destiny, not the thousand thousand he would have — had he never sought to learn his fate."

"Knowledge is dangerous, then." He comes closer, and the room grows lighter, warmer. I dare not look at him. "My teacher, Aristotle, told me that small knowledge would ruin a man, but great knowledge would strengthen him." His breath, sweet and burning, touches my naked shoulder. "What, Nedjmet, would complete knowledge do?"

"My lord, I have no answer."

In a moment my skin will blister, my blood will boil. He turns and paces, and the room becomes cool.

Stopping, he says, "Tell me about your other life, Nedjmet."

"My lord, I do not understand you —"

"Yes, you do."

Looking at the earthen floor of my cage, I begin: "My parents were farmers, and I the youngest of a large family. The priests of Anubis bought me when I was three. From that day forth, I knew only the temple and the priests. They kept me inviolate, for only inviolate could I assume the power and the foreknowledge of the Initiated. There came a time, when I was fifteen floods old, when another oracle came to us in the night. He slipped into my bed, and I felt the touch of his lips upon my throat —"

*Exquisite pain, exquisite pleasure, death that was life.*

"I did what I had to do, my lord, and awoke to the life of an Initiate."

Alexander strides forward, grips the rose-thorn bars hard in his bare hands. I feel the pain in my own palms, smell the rich scent of blood, cannot stop trembling, cannot stop the flow of saliva in my cold mouth, the tingling of my sharp teeth. "And now?" he asks, his voice husky, showing no trace of pain, though I feel, *I feel* with him the warm creep of blood down his forearms. "Tell me about your life now!"

"My — my lord," I falter, "I am your prisoner."

*He wills me to look. I do not wish to look. I cannot help looking.*

He glows with more than mortal life. His features blaze, heat waits his thick hair, his face is a shining, blinding disk. I behold Amon-Ra, the Living Sun, and under the terrible heat of his being I stagger. Alexander stretches a bloody hand through the bars of thorn and with the tip of his forefinger threatens to touch my cheek.

I shrink from the touch, barely eluding his fingertip. "My Nedjmet."

Time passes, and he is gone. I do not remember his departure. But Alexander has left a trickle of his blood, drawn by the sharp thorns. Its heated smell is delicious, stronger even than the terrible stench of roses. I cannot help myself. I take the few drops from the thorns with my tongue. The rosewood kills the visions that the blood might have given me, but the blood, the blood of a god, is there. Adoration and agony mingle in my mouth.

I swallow.

I swallow.



HE CATCHES ME ON MY KNEES, the one called Antigonos. I had forgotten him, hiding there behind the curtains. He stalks forward, and I cringe from the bars, my tongue and mouth so numb that no words will come. The glorious blood of Alexander burns in a hot ball behind and between my breasts.

"You obscenity!" The words rip from his throat in a voice like a bull's, and as he strides closer his features re-mold themselves into the visage of a bull: Horns sprout from his forehead, his face elongates into a muzzle, his single eye burns with a wild bull's power and hatred for all that is small and weak.

*They are all gods here.*

He is so close I smell the barnyard musk of him, more masculine than anything I have ever known, more even than Alexander. Antigonos thrusts himself against the bars, and for the first time I am grateful for them. "I will not allow you to corrupt him, do you hear?" The bull-man seethes with anger, his blood boils. "Alexander is not one of your decadent Egyptian peasants! He is Lord of the World, you filth." He drops to his haunches, all but paws the earth. "Listen well. I know about you. Your kind are not truly immortal. There are ways of dealing with you."

His voice drops to a harsh whisper: "A stake through the heart. Decapitation. Or fire, if one watches closely and allows no

bird or flying beetle to pass through the flame and bear your cursed essence away."

My tongue has swollen to fill my mouth, mangled by the juice of the roses. I cannot tell him that shape-shifting is only myth and legend, that we wear the forms we live in for as long as we exist. But Antigonus is right about the ways of ending. We are like mortals in that respect, not like gods. Gods are truly immortal, and live in their realm forever. Even the Initiates are subject to the final death, the parting of spirit and flesh, if the task is done correctly. We are not unlike men in that respect.

*Except that a man may bring his own release. We never do, for we cannot. We cannot. We are doomed to long, long lives.*

Antigonus rages, but I no longer fear. The god's blood has brought me a vision, after all: The disk of Amon-Ra rises above the eastern horizon as I have not seen it for five hundred years, and I feel the god consuming my flesh.

*I see my own death. I am afraid.*

*It calls to me in a voice sweeter than blood.*

**F**OR WEEKS THE GODS LEAVE ME ALONE. During the days I rest. At night, Alexander has the curtains drawn aside — or are they drawn during the daytime, too? Do roses need sun? Once I knew such things. At any rate, by night I can gaze out into the courtyard on one side, over the roofs of the city on the other. I long for Anubis to visit me, as he used to, but the darkness is not strong enough to push back the torchlight, the starlight. I wait alone, and increasingly I hunger.

On the fifteenth night after our last meeting, Alexander is there when I emerge from my sarcophagus. I avert my gaze and see the child.

He is a slave boy, ten or eleven. His eyes are mad with fear. He has torn his flesh in a dozen places, trying to claw through the confining rose thorns. When he sees me, his brown eyes roll upward in their sockets, and from his gaping mouth comes a thin, hoarse, keening cry.

Revelation whips through me. I turn on Alexander, in my rage forgetting what he is. "How dare you!"

From where he stands, twenty paces away, Alexander says simply, "You will feed now."

"How dare you! This is beneath you, my lord. The child is terrified."

"I believe he has fainted."

I turn and approach the still form. He is light in my arms, but we Initiates have strength beyond our size. The poor lacerated hands drip slow into the earth. I smell the blood and the fear. I hold the boy close to my bosom, sinking to my knees. Cradling him, one hand behind his head, I rock him gently, crooning meaningless syllables. His heart thuds against my ribs like a terrified bird caught in a loosely gripped fist.

*In my breast my heart lies still, as it has lain for five hundred years.*

"You will feed, Nedjmet."

And then it comes back to me, What Alexander is, and Who. "Yes, my lord," I murmur. "But not like this. I beg you, not like this."

"How, then?"

I tell him. He leaves briefly, and when he returns, servants are with him, their staves white-rimmed with horror of me. One carries a basin. She puts it on the marble floor outside the cage, and Alexander orders her to put it through the bars. She almost refuses, but I walk to the far side of the cage, still carrying my living burden, and turn my back. When I turn again, the basin is there. I bathe the boy's wounds, wash the stringy blood from the ripped palms and forearms.

The next servant brings drugged wine. The boy, only half recovered, sips it, then gulps it. And when he lolls, loose as a doll, then I plead again: "My lord, would you leave us alone for a space?"

"No. I will see."

My fast has lasted long, and the tug of blood is powerful. My lips stretch back without volition. My teeth feel the coolness of the air, then the warmth of the living throat. Hot life floods my mouth, and I drink, closing my eyes, knowing the boy's whole being as I take strength from him.

*He is a slave child, the child of a comely mother, and ...*

*I choke.*

*... and his father stands without the cage, his burning eyes intent on my every move.*

Poor illegitimate issue of a casual lust. I cradle the body in my arms as I drink, knowing that my loins will never give birth. The Initiated may perform the act of love, but they do not feel the emotion, nor do they bear young. I drink. And Know.

*He has been in his father's bed. He has felt his father's passion, has been the receptacle of Alexander's debauchery.*

*I wish we could weep. I wish we could weep.*

*I see possible futures for him. He will die a pitifully young soldier in a battle to be fought in six years. He will die an old man, having lived a long and empty time. In twenty years a crowd will stone him as a thief. In all the possible paths of his life, he will never know his father was a god.*

*Can gods sin?*

I lay him gently upon the dirt floor. His chin is upthrust, the fine bonework cage of his chest heaving for breath. In the torchlight even his lips are pale. Alexander comes near, and I retreat to the far corner, beside my gilt sarcophagus. He stares at me. "Will the boy die now?"

"No," I say. I wipe my lips and chin with my fingers, lick the last of the blood from them.

That hot, hot gaze, the eyes of the Living Sun. "Will he become — what you are?"

"No. There is more to Transfiguration than this. The boy will recover and be well."

Alexander leaves without a farewell. I caress the boy's damp hair and see in the lines of his face signs of his heritage.

*Gods, I wish we could weep.*

I OPEN THE SARCOPHAGUS AND STEP OUT. MY CAGE HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED: chairs, a table, an oil lamp, a polished bronze mirror that is no good to me. Combs for my thick raven hair. Essences, sweet-smelling, bound in boxes, contained in small jars. Dresses carefully folded, the finest white linen, some priestly garments like the robe I wear, some cut to leave my breasts bare. For use with these, I suppose, are adornments, circlets of gold inset with gems to wear about my neck. The earth floor has vanished beneath marble tiles, cold beneath my bare feet. The hall is in darkness. I am alone.

*"Greetings, little morsel."*

Fear, the simple panic known by prey, flashes through me like lightning. How long has he waited in darkness, the man of black and gold? Seleucus, his name is. He paces forward, the leather of his armor creaking, his white smile startling in the dimness, a cruel sickle moon. His face becomes the face of a tiger. Another god. The earth is full of gods, it vomits them.

*His muzzle is white, his face the orange of fire, striped with midnight.*

*"I have waited for you, small one."*

*Yes. I have drunk the blood of travelers from as far as India, I know of tigers. Tigers are patient, infinitely patient, waiting for prey. This one waits to devour — what? The world?*

*"No words for me, little one?"*

*"My lord, I know not what to say."*

He paces, smooth and easy in his movement as a cat, his golden gaze never leaving me. "Alexander wants something from you, Egyptian prophet."

I cannot reply. He comes to the bars, chest touching them. I smell the cat-rek of him, ammonia and old blood. He touches the bars languidly. "I wonder," he says, his voice a purr, "I wonder if these are to keep us safe from you — or the other way around." His golden eyes narrow. "Antigonus would kill you if Alexander permitted. You know that, don't you?"

My eyes are downcast. I see the linen of my gown, white in



the darkness, and against the plain white marble of the floor my dark feet, like two mice. "Yes."

"How much do you know of this game, little prophet? Do you know our names? Let me tally them for you. Antipater holds Greece and Macedonia for our lord. Lysimachus is regent of Thrace. Antigonos Cyclops you know, Antigonos the One-Eyed."

"The bull," I breathe.

His laugh rumbles, a snarl expressed in a lighter key. "The bull, very good. Very sharp of you, little oracle. Yes, Antigonos is a bull, strength without cunning, anger without artifice. And there is Ptolemy Soter — I do not believe you have met him, but you shall. He is tall and thin, and his bony hands are ready to grasp as much power as he thinks he can hold. Oh, yes, he will visit you, most definitely. And then my humble self, Seleucus Nicator. I flatter myself that since the death of Cleitus the Black, I am Alexander's closest friend. Do you know of Cleitus?"

"No, my lord."

"Ah, it was tragic. It happened at Maracanda, while our armies were gathering. Cleitus — you must understand, Cleitus had been Alexander's boyhood friend, his most loyal follower. At the Battle of the Granicus, Cleitus saved Alexander's life. Well, this is a changeable world. Cleitus, drunk, told Alexander to his face that Alexander was no god, merely a mortal. And Alexander seized a pike and impaled his oldest friend. The gout of blood bursting forth was astonishing. And appalling, of course. Quite appalling."

The golden eyes glow. I cannot allow myself to look into them. They would rip me to pieces.

"Nothing to say, Egyptian oracle?" Seleucus shakes his head, but his eyes remain fixed and steady. "Alexander wept for days. I have not known him to weep often. One other time, when his army failed him even as we stood on Indian soil. He wept tears of rage, the tears of a master whose tools had proved weak and had shattered in his grasp."

"I did not know these things, my lord."

"No. You do not see much of the world, do you? And yet they say of your kind that you can... control the minds of men. Can you use your mind to seize and direct the minds of others?"

*How shall I answer? With the truth, that our kind can do such things, but that the Initiates never taught me the skills? With a lie, that his words are strange to me?*

Before I can frame an answer, Seleucus the Tiger God says, "Little one, they say you are ancient. Surely one who has lived so long must be a fountain of wisdom and cunning. Surely if you could seize the mind of a powerful man, you could hold that of a god — a very young god. A god only thirty-three summers old, only a twelfth part, a twentieth part, of your age? That could not be too hard for you."

I cannot stop the tortured question from bursting out: "My lord, what would you have of me?"

The rumble of laughter again. "As the Spartans once said, little one, if Alexander wishes to be a god, why, let him be a god. I do not crave the light. Shadows suit me best. If Alexander becomes — let us say, godlike — then you, small one, shall have great power over him. What I want is simply to assure you that now and ever will I

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have power over you. If my king wishes to become immortal, why, I have no choice but to become immortal with him. But perhaps without burdening him with the knowledge. Let Alexander seek godhood. All I ask is control, little one. All I need are the shadows and control."

*When he walks away, his footsteps are silent. He dwindles from tiger to man as he loves, but I have seen the face of this god. It is that of a hungry god, a devourer of men.*

*A devourer of nations.*

"IS THIS NOT BETTER, NEDJMET?"

"I thank my lord."

Alexander, the Living Sun, stands before me again. He asks how I have received his gifts, his beneficence. What can I say? A brightly decorated cage is but a cage. But something the Tiger God put into my mind makes me wonder and strive. Fiercely, as strongly as I can, I think to Alexander, willing him to speak to me of himself, of his ambitions. My head feels as if it will fly apart, but he stands stolid and massive beyond me.

*Perhaps if I look into his eyes —*

*A glance of his eyes would blind me.*

*I must try. I must.*

"My lord?"

"Yes, Nedjmet?"

"May I — may I look into your face?"

"That would give me pleasure. You are comely, and yet you carry your eyes ever downcast, or turned aside. Yes. Look at me."

I have to do it suddenly, or I will lose the will. His eyes — oh, his eyes! They brand my soul, burn into me, leave me nothing of myself save a distant echo of lost Nedjmet.

*Speak to me, Alexander. Speak to me. Tell me about yourself. He approaches, looking down as I look up. Gods, gods, how long can one stare into the sun and not go mad?*

He tilts that leonine head and smiles. "Do you know much about me, Nedjmet? Would you know more?"

If my heart could beat at all, it would

burst at his smile. I breathe the words more than speak them: "Yes, my lord."

"My father was Philip of Macedon, my mother his fourth wife, Olympias." I fight not to lose myself in his eyes as the torrent of words I willed spills forth. Alexander speaks of boyhood, laughs in remembering how he ragged that his father would leave him no realms to conquer. He tells me of Aristotle, of his thirst for learning, his love of Greece. I hear of battles fought, victories won, revenge taken: Thebes laid waste, Darius humiliated, Egypt welcoming him as a better ruler than the despised Persian despot. "At the temple of the Sun God," he murmurs, his voice like the voice of one half asleep, "at the temple of Zeus-Amor, the priests anointed me and hailed me and called me god. My mother often told me that Philip was merely my earthly father, that Zeus had come to her as a thunderbolt and had quickened me in her womb. And that was when my greatest ambition began — my greatest."

On and on he speaks, the swift hours fleeting. The curtains are parted to the east, and through the colonnade, the courtyard grows pale. Dawn has come, so soon, too soon. I close my eyes at last, and will Alexander to cease his story. His voice trails off. He looks like a sleeper newly awakened. His hair begins to stir, his skin to glow from within, and I feel that he has spoken only truth, that he is Amor-Ra,

the Living Sun, deadly to my kind. The sun is rising outside, and here inside as well.

"A god," he says, his voice husky. "Only a god could take and hold the world. I stood on the banks of the Indus and looked eastward. How far eastward does the world go? Beyond India, they say, lie other realms. And beyond them? Does the world go on forever? And if not — what lies beyond? Only a god could know such vastness, and only a god could hold it." He lifts a clenched fist, heat boiling from it, and his whole body bursts into incandescence. I cannot look at him. I cannot look away.

He smiles. His hand again, thrust through my bars, the finger outstretched. I cannot move. The tip brushes my cheek, I feel the fire of it, smell the stench of burning flesh. A blister rises where he brushed me.

*Too long did I dwell in god-haunted Egypt. Too long. Too long.*

THERE IS ONE NEW GOD LEFT. SELEUCUS SPOKE of him, and Alexander. He will come.

And one evening, the night after my fourth or fifth feeding, he does. Seated at my table, my hands folded before me, motionless, breathless, I know him as he enters the hall, far away. He approaches slowly, not with the prowling suavity of Seleucus Nicator, or with the hoofed violence of Antigonos Cyclops, but with deliberate steps, long legs, craning neck. His sparse hair is gray, swept back from his temples, his nose prominent, his eyes dispassionate, distant. Since the manifestation of the Living Sun, my vision has been dull, but I see the change begin. Nose lengthens and becomes a beak, hair thickens to quills, to feathers, and the eyes — the eyes become mad and red, as two drops of blood, with blackness at their center. I stand and bow before the Heron-Headed God, the one who is perhaps most dangerous of all.

As if knowing my thoughts, Ptolemy speaks, his voice calm, flat, without passion. "There are gods and then there are gods, Nedjmet of Egypt. You must be most careful of dealing with Alexander."

"My lord," I say, "to become a god is easy. To remain a god — that is most difficult."

"Yes." The eyes do not blink, do not threaten. They are empty and uncaring, mad and red. "You are wise beyond your appearance. Today Alexander is a god. In fifty years, a hundred, a thousand, he is dust on the wind."

That is not what I meant, but I say nothing.

The Heron-Headed God cocks his head to one side. "You are not good for my lord Alexander. You fill him with mad dreams. He is like — like a flame, burning too brightly, too hot. He will burn himself out, and perhaps burn the world up. You do not wish to see our lord Alexander mad, do you?"

"No, my lord."

"Men are not made to be gods. Their shoulders are not fit to bear the burdens of the heavens and the earth." The heron's eyes are implacable. Like the Tiger-Headed God, this one has patience, too, but of a different sort. It is the serenity of a fisherman who knows that, if he but waits long enough, his belly will be full. The beak is merciless, or worse than merciless, indifferent. The Heron knows no pity, not for others, not for itself.

"Think, child," he says. "Think what would happen should —

Does  
the world go  
on forever?  
And if not —  
what lies  
beyond?  
Only a god  
could know  
such  
vastness,  
and only a  
god could  
hold it.

may the gods forbid it! — should Alexander die. He has conquered nations. Do you see any whose hands are powerful enough to hold all those reins at once?"

"No, my lord." It is true. Amon-Ra holds the entire world in his embrace, and only he; a lesser god could not reach so far. "I see none."

"No," agrees the god. "Do not think, young oracle, that we have not spoken of contingencies. Only fools would neglect to do that, and whatever else we are, we are not fools. Should something happen to our lord Alexander, then each of his faithful lieutenants has a domain to rule. To my lot falls your homeland, Egypt. Tell me what I am thinking, little oracle."

I have not tasted his blood, but the blood madness in his eyes is enough and gives me the story. "My lord, you are thinking that holding Egypt would be easier if you had the voice of Anubis's own oracle to speak for you."

The heron head shimmers, shrinks in upon itself, becomes the face of a man again. "Yes. Exactly."

*One would think those eyes saw now. One would think oneself safe now. If one were a fool.*

"Reflect on that," Ptolemy says. His voice is an old man's reedy piping now. "And a word of warning, my little oracle: I fear that my lord Alexander would prove a most jealous god."

I am alone again. Gods, what have you done to me? How long have I lived in a cage?

And why could not I see those other bars? All of them, even the lord Alexander, live in cages.

*And his cage, gods help us all, his cage is the world.*

I WAKEN AT SUNSET AND HEAR FEARFUL sounds.

When they subside I raise the lid of my resting place and gaze upon desolation. The curtains have been ripped from their fixtures

above the columns. Only shreds of purple rag hang there now. My table, my meager furnishings, have been maulled, battered, smashed. Someone has lifted the squares of marble from the dark earth, has flung them one upon another, shattering them to rubble.

The three wait beyond the bars of thorn, their bosoms heaving, fear and triumph struggling for mastery upon their faces. I know them.

How do I know them? Did I imbibe some little knowledge with those few drops of Alexander's blood? It must be so.

Statira and Parysatis might be sisters, tawny-skinned, voluptuous, full-breasted, almond-eyed. Their lips curl at the sight of me. They are daughters of Persian kings, taken by Alexander as brides, not for love but for political advantage. They hate me, they fear me.

*But they fear the other more.*

Roxana stands behind the other two, taller, more robust, more like Alexander. She is Bactrian, Alexander's first wife, and the mother of his only child. His only legitimate child, I amend, recalling the wretched slave boy. I come close to the bars, as close as I dare, the cold earth yielding beneath my bare feet, the broken marble shards trying to pierce my skin. "You must hate me more than even Antigonos does," I tell them.

The two Persian princesses shrink back, as if fearing that I will break my bars and sink my teeth into their worthless flesh. Rox-

ana does not yield. Her eyes flash. She is terrible and magnificent. "Antigonus is only a man. What does he know of hate? What do you know of hate?" Her voice lashes me like the lightning strike of a desert scorpion. "You — I will teach you the meaning of hatred!"

It is hard to capture their stares, but I try. My mind is like a weak muscle, strained from strong, unaccustomed exercise. I force it to move in strange patterns, I send feelings and thoughts to them all: *You fear me. You cannot match me or defeat me. If you had to enter my cage at night, you would die before I touched you, your hearts burst in terror.*

Statira wails, Parysatis drops to her knees. Roxana stands her ground, gives back stare for stare. She is not a god, but if she were, I think she would bear the head of Bast, the cat, whose eyes shine forth with mystery under mystery forever. Roxana sweeps forward, and, like a stone pulled to earth, I approach the bars. She stands less than an arm's length from me. This woman could enter my cage, could drive a stake through my heart, could rend me with nails and teeth. She reaches out, grasps the neck of my linen robe, and jerks, tearing the fabric, revealing my bosom.

"You," she says. "Your little breasts have never given life to a child of your own. Has any man touched them with delight? I think not."

*My lip is trembling absurdly. We do not weep. We cannot weep.*  
"You are not a woman. You are a thing. What mortal would willingly give himself to your cold and rotten embrace?"

*I will not lower my gaze. I will not.*

"And you would have my lord, my husband, my Alexander? You! He would split you like a melon on a pike! Do you even know what to do with a living man, other than feed on him like a leech? Have you ever felt a man's weight on your belly, spread your thighs and felt a man's power fill your body? Have you ever felt love, thing? Have you ever felt anything at all?"

*I will not look away. I will not.*

She shakes with fury. "Damn you! What have I to do with gods? I love a man!"

**T** EARS FLOW — FROM HER EYES, NOT mine. They astonish me, as the bursting gush of blood from Cleitus's pierced breast astonished Alexander's generals. This woman — why does she weep? What does she feel that I have never felt, can never feel?

"I loved him when he humbled my father and brought me forth from Bactria as tribute. I loved him when he took me as wife to hold the Western Satraps. I even loved him when he left our bed for the arms of the wretched catamite Hephaeston — may his shadow wander sightless in hell!"

Starting defiantly through her streaming tears, her voice not sobbing but fierce and strong, Roxana says, "But if you make Alexander a god, what then? He loves me now. Will he still love me when I grow haggard, when my breasts are withered dugs, my hair lank and gray? Will he kiss my toothless mouth? What will he do with his aging bride as he stays young and strong forever?"

*But I do not want to initiate Alexander. I do not want to sleep the days away with him on a couch of mingled Egyptian and Macedonian earth. I do not crave his touch, cannot imagine his embrace, his hands gliding over my skin. I do not. I do . . . not . . .*

She reads my thoughts. "Oh, he will have a helpmate ready to hand, won't he? A new concubine, ever fresh, ever virginal? But what midwife will bring forth your babe, Egyptian? And what horror would you birth?"

*I have never felt this way. Why do my breasts ache? What is this force that makes my thighs tremble?*

The tears dry on Roxana's cheeks, like spring rain on a stony hillside. "My son," she says, and now her voice is angry. "What need does a god have for an heir? What will become of him?"

The other two, emboldened, begin to shriek their hatred for me.

On unsteady legs I retreat to the sarcophagus. The lid falls on screams, and they are distant, the droning of mosquitoes.

*These are not gods. But what mortals are they? What passion do they feel?*

I groan in the darkness. If ever I truly want to die, I need only whisper the secrets of our undoing to Roxana. The others are bold to come into my cage when the sun prevents my rising. I do not think they would have the courage to open my sarcophagus.

But Roxana — Roxana would dare come at midnight.

*And I think I would welcome her arrival.*

AN EVENING COMES WHEN I PRESS MY PALMS AGAINST THE SARCOPHAGUS lid and feel the cold mockery of silver chains. I wait.

I have lived for half a millennium, and now to me a night spent without sight of Alexander is longer than all that tally of years put together.

Nights pass. I will myself to stillness. Hunger grows in me, the only force that can drive the initiate to acts beyond their own will. At times I believe I am dreaming, but know that really the visions drift past my wakeful eyes. The dead do not dream.

*Do gods dream? Do gods weep?*

So long a journey. The priests of Amon-Ra turned me over to the soldiers of Persia. By barge and by wagon they carried me to the mouth of Father Nile, and in the close darkness I felt his power flowing beneath me or beside me the whole way. When I heard the sound of a cataract, it pulled me back so strongly to the days of my life that I writhed inside the sarcophagus. My mother knelt beside me, clasping my two small hands in one of her large ones. She stretched my arms high over my head. I stood naked, ankle-deep in the Nile, and she bathed me with cupped handfuls of water.

*My only memory of her. She is dust now, dust long ago. The very poor do not receive the kindly attentions of embalmers. Or do I mistake? Did giving a daughter to a god make special dispensation for my mother? Does she wait on the far dark shore of death, wondering when her daughter will join her?*

From Egypt to Syria. I felt through the gilded wood the hostile desert, sensed strange blood flowing in alien veins all around me. From Syria to Persia, and so to my cage in Parsa. Even Parsa has passed away. Men now name it Persepolis, as they name so many new cities Alexandria.

*The Shining One scatters cities as a sower scatters seed. His name marks all maps, his fame burns like tapers in every temple.*

And thence to the ziggurat, and now to here, in the palace of Alexander. When he last visited, Alexander spoke not a word about the wreckage his wives had made. He had given an order, and all was set right, mended, made new before the next evening came. Or did he even need to give an order? A god's best servants pride themselves upon anticipating their master's every wish.

"We will walk in the courtyard some night," he teased. And with boyish earnestness, he explained that he had caused fountains and artificial streams to be made, so that I would be confined to the garden. He believes we cannot cross running water.

*Perhaps I could not wade the Nile. Perhaps a god could. Why would Alexander wish to walk with me? What does a god feel?*

The moon never shone on our walk. Alexander visited me almost every night. Once even made me laugh at some silly jest.

*If I laugh, cannot I weep? If I weep, cannot I love?*

And now? What now? Why has my lord enchained me for so long? Hunger grows in my belly like a malignant child. I clench my teeth and feel my fangs biting into my own lip. They grow long and sharp with the desire for blood. When I am sated, they are hardly noticeable, only slightly more prominent than any mortal woman's. But when I hunger they grow until they are as the fangs of a deadly serpent. No man, seeing me in that state, could love me.

Movement. The jangle of chains. I am being lifted. I close my eyes and try to touch the minds around me. Who is taking me, and whither? Too weak, I am too weak. The sarcophagus clumps to a resting place on some yielding surface. Not earth. I would know the earth. Carpets? A pile of carpets?

*Gods, gods, what place is this?*

The slumber of another day comes upon me. Then sounds, many sounds, all around. Wild laughter, shouts, the clink of metal on metal, not the sound of combat, but — of revelry? Is that the word I want?

And a wilder sound, music, but not the stately music of tabor and flute, not the ceremonial march of the god Anubis, whom I served. A melody like a throbbing pulsebeat, growing frantic, fierce.

*Light!*

After so long in the dark, the light strikes me as a physical force, slamming me down into my cushion of earth. Music, laughter, mockery assault me. I cannot think, I cannot move —

Hands grasp my arms, my shoulders, my legs, pull me from my darkness. Not sunlight, but the glare of a thousand torches assails me, the press and heat and smell of a thousand bodies unbalance my senses. Hastily the huge men who plucked me from my resting place set me upright. I reel, almost falling.

*So many so many so many.*

Two thousand eyes feast on me, small and dark in all this glory. An enormous man, a Nubian, stands before me, misery etched on his face. "Forgive me, priestess," he whispers, and like Roxana, he grasps my garment. He rips it free entirely, leaving me naked. My hands fly as of their own volition to cover the secret parts of me: breasts and teeth.

*Gods, is that the scent of wine, so strong? Do they drink it? Do they boil it and intoxicate themselves on the vapors? My senses whirl and I stagger. The smells, the odors, precious oils, and essences mixed with sweat, rare incenses, and roasting meats mingle cruelly. And under it all, some other human scent, sharp and tantalizing.*

My eyes accustom themselves to the light. A banquet hall, a long, low table, the whole length of the great room: Around it men and women recline, eating, drinking, stroking each other's hair, each other's flesh, their mocking faces turned my way, flushed with lust and languor —

*so much food and wine*

Many are as naked as I. In shadowy corners and even in the open I see them, entwined, coupled, heads thrown back in the grimace that is so much like pain. They are the source of the strange scent that lurks beneath the others. I watch them writhe in the flickering lights and my mouth goes dry and my teeth throb. So different from stolen visions, so different.

I have not noticed what the Nubian is doing. He has fetched a chain of silver, its ends free, its middle swathed in lamb's wool. Tenderly, he wraps the cushioned part about my waist. He and another servant drag me forward, step after step, toward a dais at the end of the room.

Hands touch me, brush my legs, as they drag me the length of the table. I hear muttered comments: "Cold." "Unholy." "Dead." I glare drunkenly at them. They stare at my fangs and all comments cease. An avenue of silence forms along my procession to the gods.

Alexander sprawls on his throne, in the highest place. Below him, on another platform, are the lesser gods: Antigonos, Seleucus, Ptolemy. As I come nearer, their features melt, flow, re-mold themselves: the Bull-Headed, the Tiger-Headed, the Heron-Headed.

And Alexander begins to glow as though with an inward flame. Terrified, I feel an answering warmth within myself, where for twenty generations of men there has been only coldness.

Alexander rises, and slaves pull his throne away. Hands throw cushions, purple, scarlet, white, black, onto the high platform. Alexander stands godlike, a golden goblet held in his hand. He staggers a little as my captors drag me up the steps to the first platform. The cup falls from his hand, clashes unnoticed to the floor.

*He is the Living Sun. I long for immolation.*

He reaches for me, seizes the chain wrapped around me, lifts me to his level. My head barely reaches his breast. He pulls the silver chain loose, lets it fall. I do not hear it fall. The world spins.

*There is no crowd here. There are no lesser gods. There is only the Living Sun.*

He puts his huge hands on my shoulders. I do not think I can bear their heat, but the fire kindled within me somehow leaps to meet

Alexander's. He bends to me, his breath burning, wine-soaked, in my nostrils, and crushes his mouth against mine. I dare not open my lips to the probe of his tongue, I dare not bare my secret to him. He nuzzles my hair, my neck. I do not think I can exist any longer.

*"Feed."*

It is a harsh command, ripped from his belly.

*What am I doing? What am I doing?*

My fangs pierce his jugular with a crunch audible only within my head. Molten fire pours into my mouth, fills me, over-fills me. I choke, gasp, and burning blood spatters my small breasts. I lock one arm around his neck, like embracing a white-hot column of iron. I drink and drink, and the wine he has consumed intoxicates me as well. I rub myself against him, try to pluck aside his robes. His hands drive me to a place I have never known.

*I can drink no more.*

I simply drop from him, sated, blood-blind. He towers above me, flaming, that smile on his face. Through the blood that still fills my mouth, I whisper, "There is more, my lord. There is a further step."

Pale though he is, he stoops and lifts me from the cushions, showing no effort. His arms are more powerful than bars of silver or of rose thorn. He embraces me below my hips. "I know there is more," he slurs. He nuzzles my right breast, and I feel it growing sharp-tipped.

*What is this? What is this? What is this?*

I brace my hands on his shoulders. He looks up at me, and I want him more than I have ever wanted life or death. He lowers his head and I hear him snarl. He has no fangs, but his teeth are strong. They seize the flesh of my breast, they tear —

"No!" I try to push away, but desire is too strong for me and my will deserts me. Alexander buries his face in the gush of blood, gulping greedy mouthfuls, swallowing.

My bare feet kick the air. My neck arches back, my teeth clench, I cannot open my eyes. He knows! He knows that the exchange of blood is the Initiation, brings forth the Transfiguration.

*All grows dark, and the darkness swirls, a maelstrom, a vortex, pulling power from me and feeding it to this god. I strain for a vision, for the knowledge that his blood should give me, and gods, I see, the path of his destiny and his fate. The Heron had called him a jealous god, and so he would be, suffering no other gods before him, or even next to him. I see his fate, and it is ashes and barrenness and death for me and for my kind forever —*

**I** SEE THE GOD-CROWDED LANDS OF THE HIND, HILLS crowned by temples carved with a thousand copulating figures, and they vanish in the light of the Living Sun at Midnight. I see the Living Light stream over mountains that pierce the very sky.

*The Vortex swirls, sweeps me along with it.*

I see Alexander, burning in robes of scarlet and gold silk, on a throne of jade dragons, worshipped by black-haired people with amber skins.

*The faces waver in and out of my vision: the Bull, the Tiger, the Heron. They wax and wane in his light, their animal eyes never blinking. I try to pull away from the drinking god. Why are my thighs wrapped around his chest? Why does my hand clutch his hair, pulling him close as if I want him inside me?*

The Vortex floods, like the Nile, a dark tide of blood and power. I see golden armies marching at night, swarming through conquered lands under midnight-black banners emblazoned with the golden Living Sun. White-clothed cities to the west fall, barbarian giants in fur and bronze humble themselves. I write and beat upon his broad shoulders with my small fists, I kick and squirm and try to force myself down upon him and still the visions come.

I see my poor brothers and sisters, the Children of Anubis, hunted from our sad, dark places, staked to earth or dragged into the destroying sun.

I see gigantic quinquiremes setting sail from the Straits of Hercules, new lands beyond the Ocean Sea conquered for the Living Sun.

*I see a world that lives in darkness, because that is where its god lives.*

*Its only god. Its only god. Oh, gods of Egypt and Everywhere! He is not Amon-Ra.*

*He is Aton! He is Aton!*

He is the Lone God, the Lonely God. And of all our kind, he, only he, would possess the iron will to maintain himself aloof, the sole dark god of the world.

I lie back on the cushions again. Blood clothes my breasts, my arms, my throat. I groan and try to rise and cannot.

Alexander bends close, his bloody mouth ready to place a kiss on my cheek. "Now Nedjmet, my Nedjmet, tell me of my destiny," he whispers. "Tell me of ours."

With my last drop of strength, I whisper back, "My lord, you will die."

*Alexander starts, but no one else could have heard. Someone is behind Alexander, offering him support. Before my vision goes to gray and then to black, the last thing I see is a tiger's smile.*

"HE IS DEAD!"

Once more hands have ripped me from my sarcophagus.

Someone — Alexander? — has cleaned me, but not clothed me. "How long?" I pant in the hot desert air.

The Bull is upon me, the Bull no longer, but just a one-eyed, battle-scarred giant of a man. He strikes me across the face. "Stinking vixen!"

"How long?" I ask again.

Antigonos bares his teeth. "It took him ten days to die. We have sent his body back to Egypt, where the priests of Zeus-Amon will arrange for the burial. However, I will conduct your funeral myself."

*They do not fear me now.*

I allow myself to be carried to an eastward-facing hillside. The stars are so strange. Are they gods? Some think they are gods.

"We sent him in a golden coffin," sobs Antigonos. "He believed your lies. Let us see how penitent you can be."

*The stakes are made of rosewood.*

The first two pierce my feet, holding them so that my legs are spread as if I were with a lover. A third stake, through my left palm, and a fourth through my right. The rosewood is cruel, but the pain does not matter. Antigonos holds a fifth. It is for my heart, I think, and I close my eyes to welcome it. His brute hand strokes my right breast, and I feel defiled to let a mortal touch the shrine where a god worshipped. "You heal well, stripy," snarls Antigonos.

The fifth stake pierces my belly, comes out next to my back-bone, pins me to the earth. I cannot help screaming. Tears flow from my eyes.

*I did not know that we could weep.*

When I open my eyes, Seleucus reclines on the earth beside me, a great cat at his leisure. His gaze laps my mangled body like a rough tongue. "Ten days until he died. He did not change, sweetling. He did not change."

"How long since you sent his body to Egypt?" I croak.

"A month," comes the remote, dispassionate voice of the Heron. Ptolemy stands at my feet, looking down on my body, as if it were a still pool and my heart a frightened fish. "He shall be preserved, as the Pharaohs of your land are preserved. The world will remember him as a god."

*A month. The fastest rider cannot travel from Babylon to Egypt in time to stop them now.*

Alexander  
bends close,  
his bloody  
mouth ready  
to place a  
kiss on my  
cheek. "Now  
Nedjmet, tell  
me of my  
destiny," he  
whispers.  
"Tell me of  
ours."

"We are safe," I say. My fangs have grown sharp again. Even the blood of a god can sustain one for only so long.

Antigonos kicks me in the side, and I hear ribs breaking. "Filth! What do you mean, safe?"

"Gods! Too many gods!" I shriek back at him. Seleucus rises. He and Ptolemy each hold one of Antigonos's arms, restraining him.

"You killed Alexander," bellows Antigonos. "No — you did."

They fall back, confusion on their faces. The sky behind them is lighter now. I laugh. I imitate laughter. "Did you think the transformation would be instantaneous? No, no, there must be time. A new Initiate lies as one dead for three turnings of the moon while his body changes. He was alive when you sent him on his journey to Egypt. When the embalmers have finished their work, he will be truly dead. My kind dies if our hearts are staked and our heads are removed."

Ptolemy drops to his knees. In the voice of one struck by a thunderbolt, he stammers, "The embalming process. They remove the heart. They remove the brain. They are buried in urns, separately from the body."

"As good as a stake. As good as beheading," I whisper.

I LIE ALONE. THE FOOLISH MEN HAVE GONE, leaping to their steeds, riding madly to distant Egypt to stop what they cannot stop. In their haste they have left me here, in the dregs of the night. I weep, marveling at the flow of tears across my temples, as miraculous as the annual flood of Father Nile.

*He was a god. He was a god.*

But not immortal. With an undying Alexander ruling the world, what hope for my kind? We are doomed to exist secretly, to seek the shadows. Alexander would brook no opponent, not even so small a foe as I. Had he taken the true path of destiny, he would become in time the sole Initiate,

and under his rule men would groan until the unseeable end of time. I had thought him Amon-Ra, the Living Sun, the greatest of the gods. I was wrong.

He was not Amon-Ra, but Aton, the One God, the Lonely God of the mad Pharaoh Ikhnaton, whose name men only whisper. There would have been no room for my lord Anubis or any of his brothers and sisters. No room for me or mine. Only Aton-Alexander, ruling until the sun his namesake was a cinder and all the world ashes.

*My whisper in his ear was a lie. My will made it the truth. And still I weep for what might have been.*

The stars are leaving me. One by one they depart. The sky in the east is the color of a bronze shield.

I cannot stand the touch of sunlight. Will Anubis pity me, and take me to the Afterworld, though my body withers to ash and dust on the wind? I served him faithfully for so long, and my heart did not desert him. Even to the end I put my faith in shadows.

*The sun — oh, the sun!*

My flesh already blackening, shriveling, I wrench both arms free, tearing open my palms.

*I see Alexander's face in the sun, smiling, forgiving.*

In the delirium of fire, I reach to embrace my own true god, my own true love.

*My own true death. ♣*

*If you don't watch closely,  
the things you love can  
vanish right before your eyes.*

# VANISHING ACT

BY KELLY LINK

*Illustration by Michael Gibbs*

**T**HE THREE OF THEM WERE SITTING IN A BOAT. WHEN she closed her eyes, she could almost picture it: a man and a woman and a girl, in a green boat on the green water. Her mother had written that the water was an impossible color; she imagined the mint color of the Harmon's Tupperware. But what did the boat look like? Was it green? How she wished her mother had described the boat!

*The boat refused to settle upon the water. It was too buoyant, sliding along the mint surface like a raindrop on a pane of glass. It had no keel, no sail, no oars. And if they fell in, no life jackets (at least she knew of none). The man and the woman, unaware, smiled at each other over the head of the girl. And the girl was holding on to both sides of the boat for*

*dear life, holding it intact and upright on the tilting Tupperware-colored water.*

*She realized that not only had the boat been left out of the letter; after so long she could hardly trust her parents to resemble her memories of them. That was the great tragedy, the inconvenient unseaworthiness of memories and boats and letters, that events never*





*remained themselves long enough for you to insert yourself into them....  
The girl fell out of the boat into the green water.  
Was it cold? She didn't know.*

HILDEGARD AND MYRON ARE SPYING ON HILDY'S COUSIN, JENNY ROSE. It is Thursday afternoon, October the fifth, 1970, and Jenny Rose is lying on her bed in the room she shares with Hildy. She hasn't moved once in the fifteen minutes that Hildy and Myron have been watching her. Hildy can't explain why she watches Jenny Rose:

Jenny Rose never picks her nose or bursts into tears. She mostly lies on her bed with her eyes closed, but not asleep. She's the same age as Hildy — ten — and an utter freak.

Myron says, "I think she's dead," and Hildy snorts.

"I can see her breathing," she says, handing him the binoculars.

"Is she asleep then?"

"I don't think so," Hildy says, considering. "I think she just turns herself off, like a TV or something."

They are sitting in the gazebo that Hildy's older brother James made in woodworking the year before. All of James' projects expire of ennui, which is why the white paint of the gazebo is slapdash, the slant of the structure more poetic than practical. A large oak shades the gazebo, and with the aid of a borrowed set of binoculars, Hildy and Myron can spy privately on Jenny Rose upon her bed. They have to keep an eye out for James as well, who considers the gazebo to be exclusively his.

*THE THREE OF THEM SAT IN THE BOAT UPON the water. They weren't necessarily people, and it wasn't necessarily a boat either. It could be three knots tied in her shoelace; three tubes of lipstick hidden in Hildy's dresser; three pieces of fruit, three oranges, glowing like suns in the blue bowl beside her bed.*

*What was important, what she yearned for, was the trinity, the triangle completed and without lack. She lay on the bed, imagining this: the three of them in the boat upon the water, oh! sweet to taste.*

JENNY ROSE IS THE MOST MONOSYLLABIC, MONOCHROMATIC person Hildy has ever laid eyes on. She's dun-colored, like a desert, or a mouse. Lank hair of indeterminate length, skin neither pale nor sunny, and washed-out no-color eyes. She's neither tall, nor short, fat or skinny. She smells weird, like rainwater. Does she resemble her parents? Hildy isn't sure, but Jenny Rose has nothing of Hildy's family. Hildy's mother is tall and glamorous, with red hair. Hildy's mother is a Presbyterian minister; her father teaches at the university.

The Reverend Molly Harmon's brother and sister-in-law have been missionaries in the Pacific since before Hildy and Jenny Rose were born. When Hildy was little, the adventures of her cousin became an exotic and mysterious bedtime story; she used to wish she was Jenny Rose.

During the 1965 coup in Indonesia, Hildy's aunt and uncle, and Jenny Rose, spent a few months in hiding, and then a short time in prison, suspected of being Communist sympathizers. This is the way the rumors went: they were dead; they were safely hidden in Ubud in the house of a man named Nyoman; they were in prison in Jakarta; they had been released, they were safely in Singapore. Hildy always knew that Jenny Rose would be fine. Stories have happy endings. She still believes this.

Jenny Rose was in Singapore for the next four and a half years. When her parents went back to Indonesia, it was proposed that

Jenny Rose would come to stay with the Harmons, in order to receive a secondary school education. Hildy helped her mother prepare for the arrival of her cousin. She went to the library and found a book on Indonesia. She went shopping with her mother for a second bed and a second desk, extra clothes, hangers, and sheets. The day before her cousin arrived, Hildy divided her own room into two equal halves, using a ruler.

After an embrace in the airport, passionate on Hildy's part, and unenthusiastic on the part of her cousin, Hildy hauled Jenny Rose's luggage to the car singlehandedly. "What is Indonesia like?" she asked her cousin.

"Hot," Jenny Rose said. She closed her eyes, leaned her head against the back of the car, and for the next three weeks said nothing that required more than one syllable. So far, the most meaningful words her cousin has spoken to Hildy are these: "I think I wet the bed."

"Give her time," Hildy's mother advised, putting the sheets into the washer. "She's homesick."

"How can she be homesick?" Hildy said. "She's never lived in a single place for longer than a year."

"You know what I mean," said the Reverend Molly Harmon. "She misses her parents. She's never been away from them before. How would you like it if I sent you to live on the far side of the world?"

"It wouldn't turn me into a mute, stunted turnip-person," Hildy said. But she thinks she understands. She read the library book. Who wouldn't prefer the green jungles of lazy Bali to the suburbs of Houston, the intricate glide and shadow jerk of *wayang kulit* puppets on a horn screen to the dollar matinee, *nasi goreng* to a McDonald's hamburger?

HILDY AND MYRON COME INSIDE TO MAKE hot chocolate and play Ping-Pong. They go to Hildy and Jenny Rose's room first, and

Myron stands over Jenny Rose on her bed, trying to make conversation. "Hey, Sleeping Beauty, whatcha doing?" he says.

"Nothing."

He tries again. "Would you like to play Ping-Pong with us?"

"No." Her eyes don't even open as she speaks.

There is a bowl of oranges on the night table. Myron picks one up and begins to peel it with his thumbnail.

Jenny Rose's eyelids open, and she jackknifes into a sitting position. "Those are my oranges," she says, louder than Hildy has ever heard her speak.

"Hey!" Myron says, backing up and cradling the disputed orange in his palm. He is afraid of Jenny Rose, Hildy realizes. "It's just an orange. I'm hungry, I didn't mean anything."

Hildy intervenes. "There are more in the refrigerator," she says diplomatically. "You can replace that one — if it's such a big deal."

"I wanted that one," Jenny Rose says, more softly. She lies back, her head propped on the pillow, still as if she's been carved out of stone.

"So why do you need the oranges?" Myron says.

Jenny Rose doesn't say anything. Hildy stares at her, and Jenny Rose stares, without expression, at the half-peeled orange in Myron's hand. The front door bangs open, and James, the Reverend Harmon, and Dr. Orzibal are home.

Myron's mother, Mercy Orzibal, is a professor of English, and a close friend of the Harmons. She is divorced. Myron spends a lot of time at the Harmons, under the harried attention of Hildy's mother, known as the Reverend Mother.

This afternoon was a wedding, and the Reverend Mother is still

# Hildy can't explain why she watches Jenny Rose: She's the same age as Hildy — ten — and an utter freak.

in the white robes of a divine: light reflects in brilliant daggers off the R.M. and Mercy Orzibal in her sleeveless white dress.

James is almost seventeen years old, and he hates his family. Which is all right: Hildy doesn't care much for him. His face is sullen, but this is his usual expression. His hair is getting long. His hair is red, like the R.M.'s hair. How Hildy wishes she had red hair.

A cigarette dangles from the lips of the Reverend Mother. She's reached an agreement with Hildy: two cigarettes on weekdays, four on Saturday, and none on Sunday. Hildy hates the smell, but loves the way that the afternoon light filters and falls heavily through the smoke upon her mother's beautiful face.

"Do we have any more oranges?" Hildy asks her mother. "Myron ate Jenny Rose's." There are several in the refrigerator, when Hildy looks. She picks out the one that is the most shriveled and puny. Jenny Rose has followed Myron and Hildy; she stands just inside the doorway.

"Oh, Jenny!" says the Reverend Mother, as if surprised to find her niece here, in her kitchen. "How was your day, sweetheart?"

Jenny Rose says something inaudible as she takes the orange from Hildy. The R.M. has turned away already, and is tapping her ash into the kitchen sink.

Hildy retrieves three more oranges out of the refrigerator. She juggles them clumsily. "Hey, look at me!" James rolls his eyes, the mothers and Myron applaud dutifully — Hildy looks, but Jenny Rose has left the room.

HILDY PLAYS PING-PONG IN THE BASEMENT every night with her father, uncrowned Ping-Pong champion of the world. He tells silly jokes as he serves, to make Hildy miss her return. "What's brown and sticky?" he says. "A stick."

When Hildy groans, he winks at her. "You can't disguise it," he says. "I know you think I'm the handsomest man in the world, the funniest man in the world, the smartest man in the whole world."

"Yeah, right," Hildy tells him. The sight of his white teeth across the table, floating in the mild, round pink expanse of his face, makes her sad for a moment, as if she is traveling a great distance away, leaving her father pinned down under the great weight of that distance. "You're silly." She spins the ball, fast across the net.

"That's what all the ladies tell me," he says. "The silliest man in the world, that's me."

The basement is Hildy's favorite room in the whole house, now that Jenny Rose has taken over her bedroom. The walls are a cheerful yellow, and fat stripey plants in macrame hangers dangle from the ceiling like green and white snakes. Hildy lobs a Ping-Pong ball into the macrame holders — it takes more effort to retrieve these balls than it does to place them, and at night when Hildy watches television in the basement, the forgotten balls glow with reflected TV light like tiny moons.

She lets her father beat her in the next game, and when he goes back upstairs, she ducks under the table. This is where Hildy sits whenever she needs to think. This is where she and Myron do their homework, cross-legged on the linoleum floor of their own personal cave. Myron is better at social studies, but Hildy is better at math. Hildy is better at spying on Jenny Rose. She shifts on the cold linoleum floor. She is better at hiding than her cousin. No one can spy on her under the table, although she can see anyone who comes into the basement.

She has learned to identify her family from the waist down: brown corduroy would be her father, James and Myron wear blue jeans.

Her mother's feet are very small. The R.M. never wears shoes in the house, and her toenails are always red, like ten cherries in a row. Hildy doesn't need to remember Jenny Rose's legs or toes — she would know her cousin by the absolute stillness. Jenny Rose's legs would suddenly appear above two noiseless feet, pale and otherworldly as two ghost trees. Hildy imagines jumping out from under the table, yelling "Boo!" Jenny Rose would have to see her then, but would she see Jenny Rose?

Last night at dinner, the R.M. set four places at the table — the blue plate for James, red for Hildy, orange for her husband, purple for herself. The R.M. likes routine, and her family accommodates. No one would ever eat off the wrong-colored plate — surely the food would not taste the same.

Hildy set a fifth place, yellow, for Jenny Rose, while her mother was in the kitchen, and retrieved the fifth chair with the wobbly leg from her mother's study. She did these things without saying anything. It seemed unthinkable to say anything to the R.M., who in any case, neither noticed her error, nor saw that it had been corrected. At dinner, Jenny Rose did not speak — she hardly ate. No one spoke to her, and it seemed to Hildy that no one even noticed her cousin. She was as invisible as Hildy is now, under the green roof of the Ping-Pong table. She almost feels sorry for Jenny Rose.

Jenny Rose's parents write her every week. Hildy knows this because Jenny Rose donates the stamps to Mr. Harmon's stamp collection. Her father currently has eighteen stamps, neatly cut out of the airmail envelopes, lying on his desk in the basement.

As for the letters themselves, they are limp and wrinkled, like old pairs of cotillion gloves. They are as skinny as feathers, and light, and Jenny Rose receives them indifferently. They disappear, and when the R.M. or Mr. Harmon asks,

"How are your parents doing?"

Jenny Rose says, "They're fine," and that's that.

Darling Jenny,

We have been staying in Ulbud for three weeks now, visiting Nyoman's church. Every night as we fall asleep the lizards tick off the minutes like pocket watches, and every morning Nyoman brings us pancakes with honey. Do you remember Nyoman? Do you remember the lizards, the length of your pinky? They are green, and never blink, watching us watching them.

Nyoman asks how you are doing, so far away. He and his wife are having their second baby. They have asked us to be their child's godparents, and to pick the baptismal name. Would you like the baby to have your name, Rose, if it is a girl?

It is sticky here, and we go for walks in the Monkey Forest, where the old woman sits with her bunches of bananas and her broom, swatting the monkeys away. Do you remember how they scream and fly up into the trees?

Aunt Molly wrote that you are quiet as a mouse, and I don't blame you, in that noisy family!

Love you,

Mom and Dad

HILDY KNOCKS ON THE DOOR OF HER MOTHER'S STUDY. WHEN SHE opens the door, Hildy can see a cigarette, hastily stubbed out, still smoldering in the ashtray. "It's only my second," the R.M. says, her voice tinged with guilt and secret amusement.

Jenny Rose's legs would suddenly appear above two noiseless feet, pale and otherworldly as two ghost trees.

October 10th, 1970

Hildy shrugs. "I don't care what you do," she says. "I wanted to know if you'd take me to the library. I already asked Jenny Rose — she doesn't need to go."

The R.M.'s face is momentarily blank, as if she had never heard her niece's name before. Then she frowns and taps another cigarette out of the pack.

"Three," she says deliberately. "She's so quiet, it's easy to forget she's here. Except for the wet sheets. I must be the worst guardian in the world — I got a call from one of Jenny Rose's teachers yesterday, and when I put down the phone, it flew straight out of my head. She hasn't turned in her assignments recently, and they're worried that the work might be too much for her. Does she seem unhappy to you?"

Hildy shrugs. "I don't know, I guess so. She never says anything."

"I keep forgetting to write and ask your aunt and uncle if she wet the bed before," the R.M. says. She waves her cigarette, and a piece of ash floats down onto her desk. "Has Jenny Rose made any friends at school, besides you and Myron?"

Hildy shrugs again. She is mildly jealous, having to share her absent-minded mother with the unappreciative Jenny Rose. "No, I mean, I'm not sure she wants any friends. Mostly she likes to be alone. Can you take me to the library?"

"Sweetie," her mother says. "I would, but I have to finish the sermon for tomorrow. Ask your dad when he gets home."

"OK," Hildy says. She turns to leave.

"Will you keep an eye on your cousin?" the R.M. says hurriedly. "I mean, on Jenny Rose? I'm a little concerned."

"OK," Hildy says again. "When is Dad coming home?"

"He should be here for dinner," her mother says. But Mr. Harmon doesn't come home for dinner. He doesn't come home until Hildy is already in bed, hours after the library has closed. She lies in bed and listens to her mother shout at him. She wonders if Jenny Rose is awake too.

SO HILDY AND MYRON ARE WATCHING JENNY ROSE AGAIN, AS SHE LIES on her bed. They scout their bare feet along the warm, dusty plank floor of the gazebo, taking turns peering through the binoculars.

"She hasn't been turning in her homework?" Myron asks. "Then what does she do all the time?"

"That's why we're watching her," Hildy says. "To find out." Myron lifts the binoculars. "Well, she's lying on her bed. And she's flipping the light switch on and off."

They sit in silence for a while.

"Give me the binoculars," Hildy demands. "How can she be turning off the light if she's lying on the bed?"

But she is. The room is empty, except for Jenny Rose, who lies like a stone upon her flowered bedspread, her arms straight at her side. There are three oranges in the bowl beside the bed. The light flashes on and off, on and off. Myron and Hildy sit in the gazebo, the bared twigs of the oak tree scratching above their heads.

Myron stands up. "I have to go home," he says.

"You're afraid?" Hildy says. Her own arms are covered in goose pimples, but she glares at him anyway.

He shivers. "Your cousin is creepy." Then he says, "At least I don't have to share a room with her."

Hildy isn't afraid of Jenny Rose. She tells herself this over and over again. How can she be afraid of someone who still wets the bed?

IT SEEMS TO HILDY THAT HER PARENTS FIGHT MORE AND MORE.

Their fights begin over James mostly, who refuses to apply to college. The R.M. is afraid that he will pick a low lottery number, or even volunteer, to spite his family. Mr. Harmon thinks that the war will be over soon, and James himself is closemouthed and noncommittal.

Hildy is watching the news down in the basement. The newscaster is listing names, and dates, and places that Hildy has never heard of. It seems to Hildy that the look on his face is familiar. He holds his hands open and empty on the desk in front of him, and his face is carefully blank, like Jenny Rose's face. The newscaster looks as if he wishes he were somewhere else.

Hildy's mother sits on the couch beside her, smoking. When Mr. Harmon comes downstairs, her nostrils flare but she doesn't say anything.

"Do Jenny Rose's parents miss her?" Hildy asks.

Her father stands behind her, tweaks her ear. "What made you think of that?"

She shrugs. "I don't know, I just wondered why they didn't take her with them."

The R.M. expels a perfect smoke ring at the TV set. "I don't know why they went back at all," she says shortly. "After what happened, your uncle felt that going back might be bad for Jenny Rose. They spent a week in a five-by-five jail cell with seven other missionaries, and Jenny Rose woke up screaming every night for two years afterward. I don't know why he wanted to go back at all — but then, men never think of their children or their wives."

She looks over Hildy's head at her husband. "Do they?" she says.

November 26, 1970

Darling Jenny,

We passed a pleasant Thanksgiving, thinking of you in America, and making a pilgrimage ourselves. We are traveling across the islands now, toward Flores, where the villages have rarely heard the gospel, rarely even seen people so pale and odd as ourselves. The children call us Orang bulan bulan, moon people and laugh.

We took a ferry from Bali to Lombok, where the fishermen hang glass lanterns from their boats at night. The lantern light reflects off the water, and the fish lose direction and swim upward toward the glow and the nets. From the shore you can see the fleet of boats, illuminated like ghost ships. We rode in one, the water an impossible green beneath us.

From Lombok we took the ferry to Sumbawa, and your father was badly seasick. We made a friend on the ferry, a student coming home from the university in Java.

The three of us took the bus from one end of the island to Sumbawa at the other end, and as we passed through the villages, children would run alongside the bus, waving and calling out. We asked our friend what they were saying, and he told us that the children thought we were "moon people."

We arrived on Flores, and are thinking of you, so far away.

Love,  
Mom and Dad

HILDY KEEPS AN EYE ON JENNY ROSE, AS SHE PROMISED HER MOTHER. It seems to her that Jenny Rose is slowly disappearing. Even her presences, at dinners, in class, are not truly presences. The chair where she sits at the dinner table is like the space at the back of the mouth, where a tooth has been removed, where the feeling of possessing a tooth still lingers. In class, the teachers never call on her.

Only when Hildy looks through the binoculars, watching her cousin turn the bedroom light on and off without lifting a hand,

does Jenny Rose seem solid. She is training her eyes to see Jenny Rose. Soon Hildy will be the only person who can see her.

No one else sees the way Jenny Rose's clothes have grown too big, the way she is sealing up her eyes, her lips, her face, like a person shutting the door of a house to which they will not return. No one else seems to see Jenny Rose at all.

The R.M. worries about James, and Mr. Harmon worries about the news; they fight busily in their spare time, and who knows what James worries about? His bedroom door is always shut, and his clothes have the sweet-sour reek of marijuana, a smell which Hildy recognizes from the far end of the school yard.

Jenny Rose doesn't wet the bed anymore. At nine-thirty, she goes to the bathroom and then climbs into bed and waits for Hildy to turn out the light. Which is pretty silly, Hildy thinks, considering how Jenny Rose spends her afternoons. As she walks back to her bed in the darkness, she thinks of Jenny Rose lying on her bed, eyes open, mouth closed, like a dead person, and she thinks she would scream if the lights came back on. She refuses to be afraid of Jenny Rose. She wonders if her aunt and uncle are afraid of Jenny Rose.

*THIS IS A TRICK THAT HER FATHER TAUGHT HER in the blackness of the prison cell, when she cried and cried and asked for light. He said, close your eyes and think about something good. From before. (What? she said.)*

*Are your eyes closed? (Yes.) Good. Now do you remember when we spent the night on the Dieing Plateau? (Yes.) It was cold, and when we walked outside, it was night and we were in the darkness, and the stars were there. Think about the stars.*

*(Light.)*

*In this darkness, like that other darkness which was full of the breathing of other people, she remembers the stars. There was no moon, and in the utter darkness the stars were like windowed, hard bits of glass and glitter where the light poured through. What she remembers is not how far away they seemed, but how different they were from any other stars she had seen before, so bright-burning and close.*

*(Darkness.)*

*Do you remember the Southern Cross? (Yes.) Do you remember the birds? (Yes.) She had walked between her father and mother, passing under the bo trees, looking always upward at the stars. And the bo trees had risen upward in a great beating of wings, nested birds waking and rising as she walked past. The sound of the breathing of the cell around her became the beautiful sound of the wings.*

*(Light.)*

*Do you remember the four hundred stone buddhas of Borobudur, the seventy-two buddhas that were calm within their bells, their cages? (Yes.) Be calm, Jenny Rose, my darling, be calm.*

*(Darkness.)*

*Do you remember the guard that gave you bubur ayam? (Yes.) Do you remember Nyoman? (Yes.) Do you remember us, Jenny Rose, remember us.*

*(Light.)*

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" JAMES SAYS. HE HAS COME UPON HILDY in the gazebo.

She puts down the binoculars, and shrugs elaborately. "Just looking at things."

James' eyes narrow. "You better not be spying on me, you little brat." He twists the flesh of her arm above the elbow, hard enough to leave a bruise.

"Why would I want to watch you?" Hildy yells at him. "You're the most boring person I know! You're more boring than she is."

She means Jenny Rose, but James doesn't understand. "You must be the most hopeless spy in the world, you little bitch. You wouldn't even notice the end of the world. She's going to kick him out of the house soon, and you probably won't even notice that."

"What?" Hildy says, stunned, but James stalks off. She doesn't understand what James just said, but she knows that marijuana affects the brains of the people who use it. Poor James.

The lights in her bedroom flick on and off, on and off. Light, darkness, light.

MYRON AND HILDY ARE IN THE BASEMENT. In between studying for biology, and cutting out articles for current events, they play desultory Ping-Pong. "Is your cousin a mutant?" Myron says. "Or is she just mute?"

Hildy serves. "She can talk fine, she just doesn't want to."

"Huh. Just like she doesn't bother to turn the lights on and off the way normal people do." He misses again.

"She's not that bad," Hildy says.

"Yeah, sure. That's why we spy on her all the time. I bet she's really a communist agent, and that's why you have to keep an eye on her, spying on a spy. I bet her parents are spies too."

"She's not a spy!" Hildy yells, and hits the ball so hard that it bounces off the wall. It's moving much faster than it should. It whizzes straight for the back of Myron's head, veering off at the last minute to smash into one of the spider plants.

The macrame plant holder swings faster and faster, loops up and drops like a bomb on the carpet. Untouched, the other macrame plant holders explode like tiny bombs, spilling dirt, spider plants, old Ping-Pong balls all over the basement floor.

Hildy looks over, sees Jenny Rose standing on the bottom step. She's come down the stairs as silently as a cat. Myron sees her too.

She's holding a postage stamp in her hand. "I'm sorry," Myron says, his eyes wide and scared. "I didn't mean it."

Jenny Rose turns and walks up the stairs, still clutching the postage stamp. Her feet on the stairs make no sound, and her legs are as pale as two ghosts.

HILDY COLLECTS LIPSTICK. SHE HAS TWO THAT HER MOTHER GAVE her, and a third that she found under the seat of her father's car. One is a waxy red, so red that Hildy thinks it might taste like a candy apple. One is pink, and the one that she found in the car is so dark that when she puts it on, her mouth looks like a purple bruise. She practices saying sexy words, studying her reflection in the bathroom mirror, her mouth a glossy, bright O. Oh darling, she says. You're the handsomest, you're the funniest, you're the smartest man I know. Give me a kiss, my darling.

She wants to tell Jenny Rose that if she wore bright lipstick, maybe people would notice her. Maybe people would fall in love with her, like they will fall in love with Hildy. Hildy kisses her reflection: the mirror is smooth and cool as water. She keeps her eyes open, and she sees the mirror face, eyes blind and yearning, as close to her own face as possible, the slick cheek pressed against her own warm cheek.

In the mirror, she looks like Jenny Rose. Or maybe she has watched Jenny Rose for too long, and now Jenny Rose is all she can see. She leans her forehead against the mirror, suddenly dizzy.

MYRON WON'T COME OVER TO THE HARMON'S HOUSE ANYMORE. He goes to the Y instead, plays basketball. He avoids Hildy at

school, and finally Hildy calls and explains that she needs him, that it's an emergency.

They meet in the gazebo, of course. Myron won't go inside the house, he says, even to pee.

"How are things?" Myron asks.

"Fine," Hildy says. They are elaborately formal, like two ambassadors.

"I'm sorry I called your cousin a communist."

"That's OK. Look," Hildy says. She presses the heel of her Ked against a loose board until the other end pops up. In the hollow there is a stack of white envelopes with square holes where the stamps have been cut out. She picks up the top one, dated July 19, 1970. "It's her secret place. These are her letters."

"I hope you didn't read them," Myron says nervously.

"Of course I did," she tells him. "And she's not a spy. She just misses her parents."

"Is that all?" he asks.

Hildy takes a deep breath. She remembers the cool surface of the mirror, the way it almost gave beneath her forehead, like water. "She wants to go home. She's going to disappear herself. She's been practicing with the light switch, moving it up and down. She's going to disappear herself back to Indonesia and her parents."

"You're kidding," he says, but Hildy is sure. She knows this as plainly as if Jenny Rose had told her. Jenny Rose has made herself lighter and lighter, a voyager losing herself from an anchor. The letters are a history of disappearance, reappearance, of traveling. It is what they don't say that is important.

"Her parents always tell her how much they love her, they tell her the things that they've seen and done, and they ask her to be happy. But they never tell her they miss her, that they wish she was with them."

"I wouldn't miss her," Myron says, interrupting. Hildy ignores him.

"They don't tell her they miss her, because they know that she would come to them. She's the most stubborn person I know. She's still waiting for them to say it, to say she can come home."

"You're getting as weird as she is," Myron says. "Why are you telling me all this?"

Hildy doesn't say, *Because you're my best friend*. She says, "Because you have terrible handwriting. You write like an adult."

"So what?"

"I want you to help me steal her next letter. I want you to write like them, write that she can go home now. I can't do it — what if she recognized my handwriting?"

"You want me to get rid of her for you?" Myron says.

"I think that if she doesn't go home soon, she'll get sick. She might even die. She never eats anything anymore."

"So call the doctor," Myron says. "No way. I can't help you."

But in the end he does. It is December, and the R.M. has canceled two conferences with Jenny Rose's teachers, busy with her church duties. It doesn't really matter. The teachers don't notice Jenny Rose; they call on other students, check off her name at attendance without looking to see her. Hildy watches Jenny Rose; she looks away to see Myron watching her. He passes her a note in class on Tuesday: *I can't keep my eyes on her. How can you stand it?* Hildy can barely decipher his handwriting, but she knows Jenny Rose will be able to read it. Jenny Rose can do anything.

This morning the R.M. almost walked right into Jenny Rose. Hildy was sitting at the breakfast table, eating cereal. She saw the whole

thing. Jenny Rose opened the refrigerator door, picked out an orange, and then as she left the kitchen, the R.M. swerved into the room around her, as if Jenny Rose was an inconveniently placed piece of furniture.

"Mom," Hildy said. The R.M. picked up Hildy's cereal bowl to wash it, before Hildy was finished.

"What?" the R.M. said.

"I want to talk to you about Jenny Rose."

"Your cousin?" said the R.M. "It was nice having her stay with us, wasn't it?"

"Never mind," Hildy said. She went to get ready for school.

**If she  
doesn't go  
home soon,  
she'll get sick.  
She might even  
die. She never  
eats anything  
anymore.**

THE THREE OF THEM SIT IN THE BOAT. The water is green, the boat is green, she is surprised sometimes when she opens her eyes, to find that her skin isn't green. Sometimes she is worried because her parents aren't there. Sometimes there is another girl in the boat, bigger than her, always scowling. She wants to tell this girl not to scowl, but it's better to ignore her, to concentrate on putting her parents back in the boat. Go away, she tells the girl silently, but that isn't right. She's the one who has to go away. What is the girl's name? The girl refuses to sit still, she stands up and waves her arms and jumps around and can't even see that she is in danger of falling into the water.

Go away, she thinks at the girl, I'm busy. I blew the roof off a prison once. I knocked the walls down, so I could look at the stars. Why can't I make you go away? I can walk on water, can you? When I leave, I'm taking the boat with me, and then where will you be, silly girl?

HILDY LOVES HER MOTHER'S PREACHING voice, so strong and bell-clear. The R.M. and her father fight all the time now; the R.M. stays in the kitchen until late at night, holding conversations in a whisper with Mercy Orzibal, Myron's mother, over the phone.

Hildy can't hear what she's saying when she whispers, but she's discovered that if she stands very quietly, just inside the kitchen door, she can make herself as invisible as Jenny Rose. It is just like hiding under the Ping-Pong table — no one can see her.

At night, when the R.M. screams at her husband, Hildy covers her ears with her hands. She sticks the pillow over her head. Late Hildy never loses at Ping-Pong, although she tries to let her father win. There are always shadows under her father's eyes. Next week, he is going away to a conference on American literature.

The R.M. stands straight as a pin behind the pulpit, but this is what Hildy remembers: her mother sitting curled on the kitchen floor, the night before, cupping the phone to her ear, smoking cigarette after cigarette. Hildy waited for her mother to see her, standing in the doorway. The R.M. slammed the phone down on the hook. *That bitch*, she said, and sat smoking and looking at nothing at all.

Hildy's father sits with the choir, listening attentively to his wife's sermon. This is what Hildy remembers: at dinner, the spoon trembling in his hand as he lifted it to his mouth, his wife watching him. Hildy looked at her father, then at her mother, then at Jenny Rose who never seems to look at anything, whom no one else sees, except Hildy.

It is easier now, looking at Jenny Rose; Hildy finds it hard to look at anyone else for very long. Jenny Rose sits beside her on the wooden pew bench, her leg touching Hildy's leg. Hildy knows that Jenny Rose is only holding herself upon the bench by great effort. It is like sitting beside a struck match that waits, that refuses to ignite. Hildy knows that Jenny Rose is so strong now that if she wanted, she



could raise the roof, turn the communion grape juice into wine, walk on water. How can the R.M. not see this, looking down from the pulpit at Hildy, her eyes never focusing on her niece, as if Jenny Rose has already gone? As if Jenny Rose was never there?

Even with her eyes closed for the benediction, Hildy can still see Jenny Rose. Jenny Rose's eyes remain open, her hands are cupped and expectant; her leg trembles against Hildy's leg. Or maybe it is Hildy's leg that trembles, beneath the weight of her mother's voice, her father's terrible, pleading smile. For a moment she longs to be as invisible as Jenny Rose, to be such a traveler.

When the mail comes on Monday, there is a letter from Jenny Rose's parents. Hildy extracts the letter from the pile. Myron watches, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. He is not happy about being in the same house as Jenny Rose.

All weekend Myron has been practicing two short phrases, with the aid of one of the original letters. Hildy steams open the letter over the teakettle, while Myron watches. The light in Hildy's bedroom flicks on, flicks off, flicks on again. Hildy can feel it pulling at her; for a moment, she feels as if she were falling down the spout of the kettle.

Hildy and Myron take the letter down to the basement, and sit under the Ping-Pong table while Hildy quickly scans it. Myron, who has gone to the trouble of collecting an assortment of pens, adds a careful postscript in black ballpoint.

*We miss you so much, darling Jenny. Please, please come home.*

"It doesn't match," Myron says, handing the letter to Hildy. She folds it back into the envelope and glues the envelope shut again. It really doesn't matter — Jenny Rose is ready to go, and the words will be enough, no matter whose handwriting. Hildy realizes that it wasn't so much that she was afraid Jenny Rose would recognize the handwriting — she just wants a witness, someone who will see what she has done, what Jenny Rose will do.

"I saw your father," Myron says. "He was at my house last night."

"He's out of town," Hildy says. "He went to a conference."

"He stayed all night long," Myron says. "I know because when I went to school this morning, he was hiding. In my mother's bedroom."

"You're such a liar," Hildy says. "My father is in Wisconsin. He called us from the hotel. How do you think he got from Wisconsin to your house? Do you think he flew?"

"You think Jenny Rose can fly," Myron says. His face is very red.

"Get out of my house," Hildy says. Her hand trembles at her side, with the effort not to slap him.

"I think you're nuts," Myron says. "Just like her."

Hildy rocks back and forth, sitting under the Ping-Pong table. She holds the purloined letter in her hand as if it were as sharp as a knife. She thinks about Jenny Rose, and what is going to happen.

Hildy is theatrical enough to want a bang at the end of all her labors. She wants to see Jenny Rose restored to herself. Hildy wants to see the mythical being that she is sure her cousin contains, like a water glass holding an ocean. She wants to see Jenny Rose's eyes flash, hear her voice boom, see her fly up the chimney and disappear like smoke. After all, she owes Hildy something, Hildy who generously divided her room in half, who has arranged for her to go home.

No one is in the house now. James, two months away from his birthday, is registering for the draft. Her father is still in Wisconsin (Myron is such a liar!), and her mother is at the church. So after a

while, Hildy brings the letter to Jenny Rose, gives it to her cousin, who is lying on her bed.

Hildy sits on her own bed and waits while Jenny Rose opens the letter. At first it seems that Hildy has miscalculated, that the postscript is not enough. Jenny Rose sits, her head bent over the letter. She doesn't move or exclaim or do anything. Jenny Rose just sits and looks down at the letter in her lap.

Then Hildy sees how tightly Jenny Rose holds the letter. Jenny Rose looks up, and her face is beautiful with joy. Her eyes are green; they leach all color out of the room, and all around Jenny Rose the air is hot and bright. Hildy breathes in the hot, bright air.

Jenny Rose stands up. The air seems to wrap around her like a garment. It buzzes like a thousand invisible bees. Hildy's hair raises on her scalp. All around them, drawers and cabinets dump their contents on the floor, while T-shirts whoosh up, slapping empty sleeves against the ceiling. Schoolbooks open and flap noisily around the room on white leaves of paper, and one by one the three oranges lift out of the blue bowl on the bedside table. They roll through the air, faster and faster in an ever-widening circle around Jenny Rose on her bed. Hildy ducks as tubes of lipstick slam out of their hiding place in the bureau, and dart toward her like little chrome-and-tangerine, flamingo-and-ebony-colored, missiles.

And then — "I'm making a mess," Jenny Rose says. She tears the stamp from the envelope, gives it to Hildy. Only their two hands touch, but Hildy falls back on the bed — as if she has stuck her fingers into an electrical outlet — she flies backward onto her bed.

Jenny Rose walks into the bathroom, and the door shuts behind her. As Hildy catches her breath, the air in the room becomes thin, and suddenly her ears pop. The magic trick is over, the bathroom is empty: Jenny Rose has gone home. Hildy bursts into tears, sits on her bed and waits for her mother to come home. After a while, she begins to pick up her room.

THIS IS THE FIRST AND MOST MYSTERIOUS OF THREE VANISHINGS. NO one but Hildy seems to notice that Jenny Rose is gone. A few months later, James goes to Canada, to evade the draft. He tells no one he is going, and Hildy finds the brief, impersonal note. He is failing his senior classes, he is afraid, he loves them but they can't help him. Please take care of his tropical fish. Like Jenny Rose, he is traveling lightly, and fast.

When Mr. Harmon moves out of the house, Hildy has resigned herself to this, that life is a series of sudden disappearances, leave-takings without the proper goodbyes. Someday she too might vanish. Some days she looks forward to learning this trick.

WHAT SUSTAINS HER IS THE THOUGHT OF THE BETTER PLACE IN which one arrives. This is the R.M.'s heaven; the Canada that James has escaped to; it is in the arms of Mercy Orzibal with her bright, glossy mouth, who tells Mr. Harmon *how witty, how charming, how handsome* he is. It is the green lake in the photograph Jenny Rose has sent Hildy from the island of Flores.

In the photograph Jenny Rose sits between her mother and father, in a funny little white boat with a painted red eye. On the back of the photograph is an enigmatic sentence. There is a smudge that could be a question mark, the punctuation is uncertain. *Wish you were here.*

WISH YOU WERE HERE? 

Only their two hands touch, but Hildy falls back on the bed, as if she has stuck her fingers into an electrical outlet...

The renowned author sees children's book illustration as art.

# BELOVED CHILDHOOD IMAGES

BY JANE YOLEN

**A**rt and children's stories are inextricably linked. It is virtually impossible to think of certain childhood favorites without a strong recollection of the illustrations. Peter Rabbit in his little blue jacket, dark-coated Madeline with her classmates in their two straight lines, the Cat in the Hat's red and white striped stovepipe, and Max's chubby snaggle-toothed Wild Things are as much visual as audio memories.

Yet until the last thirty years, galleries and collectors shunned the original artwork of children's book illustrators, considering such nursery fare to be somehow a less pure, less true art. In fact, the word *illustrator* had come to be a pejorative, meaning a hack, a lack-skill, a dabbler, or a professional artist without soul. In art schools, teachers regularly demeaned students who wanted to learn the skills of illustration, pushing them firmly in the direction of "fine" art or kicking them out of school altogether.

And artwork, even from the great illustrators, could be picked up for a song — from publishers tossing out years of stored drawings, from auction houses selling off an artist's estate, or even free from the artists themselves who

devalued their own productions, believing their only worth in the reproduction.

All that has changed. Today children's book illustration, much like the Velveteen Rabbit, has become Real. There are galleries that deal entirely with children's book artwork (Every Picture Tells a Story, Storyopolis in Los Angeles, or Books of Wonder in New York, for example), and galleries that have a large children's book component (R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton, Massachusetts, is one such), as well as annual shows of children's book art put on by groups as diverse as the Society of Illustrators and the Western Mass Illustrators Guild, as well as museums like the Norman Rockwell Museum and private groups' shows such as the traveling "Dream Weavers Exhibit" of last year (see *Gallery in Realms of Fantasy*, December 1994).

However, the first comprehensive exhibition to showcase the development of children's book illustration over the past century — 1894 to 1994 — will be premiered at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia, beginning June 2 and continuing through September 8. The show will then travel to Memphis (November 3, 1996 to January 6, 1997) and then on to the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington (February 15 to April 15). It will feature original paintings and





Center of Medieval Art Library of the University of Rochester

PREVIOUS PAGE: Rumpelstiltskin Spinning, by Paul O. Zelinsky from *Rumpelstiltskin*. ABOVE: Jeanne Before the Dauphin, by Louis-Maurice Boutet de Monvel from *Jeanne d'Arc*. RIGHT: The Lad in Battle, by Kay Nielsen from *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*; *Old Tales From the North*.

drawings from such beloved books as *Eloise at the Plaza*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Good Night Moon*, and many others.

The show is called "Myth, Magic, and Mystery," and is divided into four sections: Alphabet and Nursery Rhymes; Myth, Fables and Fairy Tales; Stories for Young Listeners and Readers; and Adolescent Adventures and Mysteries. But because so much in children's books contains fantasy elements, the greatest numbers of pictures in the exhibit will be paintings and drawings that touch on the fantastic. They will range from the charming line work of Garth Williams for *Charlotte's Web* to the monumental oils from N. C. Wyeth's *The Passing of Robin Hood*, the moody washes of Ed Young's treatment of the Chinese Red Riding Hood *Lon Po Po*, and the cherubic watercolors by Jessie Willcox Smith for *The Water Babies*.

In other words, the show will be as diverse, as broad, as brilliant as the world of children's book illustration. It will cover art work in all mediums, in all sizes and shapes. And it will be taken from all kinds of literature: the humorous, the zany, the heroic, the cozy; books containing illustrations that are as familiar as Dr. Seuss's and as forgotten as Frank Schoonover, the American illustrator whose oil paintings for such boys' adventure



The illustration of Rumpelstiltskin and the Spinning Wheel

stories as *Boy Captive of Old Deerfield* and *Arctic Stovovoy* are as unremembered as the books themselves.

I have been a collector of children's book art for years, and not all of it works as well off the page as on. That is not what the work was meant to do after all. The first business of a piece of illustration is to enhance the text. But in the "Myth, Magic, and Mystery" show there are certainly many pieces that hang on the wall as fine art. I want to mention four that are particularly outstanding: *Rumpelstiltskin Spinning Straw* by Paul O. Zelinsky

American Paul O. Zelinsky was a student of the quintessential twentieth century children's book illustrator, Maurice Sendak,

studying with him at Yale in the 1970s. But Zelinsky's fairy tale work looks nothing like the master's, getting its remarkable power from rich painterly details that owe more to European grandmasters than Sendak's rosy-cheeked impish children.

Zelinsky does have his impish side, and his illustrations for such books as Lore Segal's *The Story of Mrs. Lovelornight and Purrless Her Cat* might not be recognized by lovers of his fairy tale work. But he is an illustrator who is always stretching himself to fit the story at hand. His most recent *Swamp Angel*, a tall tale, was painted on the kind of boards one might find on an outhouse or a barn. His medium is part of his message.

The paintings for *Rumpelstiltskin* are Zelinsky at his most romantic, fantastic, and pure. The illustrations, with their dark umbers and deep reds and lacy golds are reminiscent of Northern Renaissance artwork. *The Spinning Straw* picture is the cover of the book, an echo of one of the interior pieces. The girl is lovely, serene; the Rumpelstiltskin is truly otherworldly, with his bulging eyes, beaky nose, and long spidery fingers. The artist's skill is so great, he makes us believe — truly — that those fingers could turn the carefully limned straw into those equally carefully limned spools of gold wire.

*The Passing of Robin Hood* by N. C. Wyeth  
Newell Convers Wyeth, the American artist who lived from 1882 to 1945, had been a student of Howard Pyle, that master of the heroic illustration. He is considered to be the most important of Pyle's artistic offspring. Raised on a Massachusetts farm, he was a keen outdoorsman and his eye for the nat-



N. C. Wyeth's *The Passing of Robin Hood* from Paul Creswick's *Robin Hood*. Robin on his deathbed, bow in hand, and flanked by the dark, weeping figure of Little John, is characteristic of Wyeth's best work.



Courtesy of the Modern Collection, University of Minnesota

ABOVE: Jack Stealing Gold, by Gustaf Tenggren from *Jack and the Beanstalk*. RIGHT: For Saint George and the Dragon, a retelling by Margaret Hodges, (published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston) Trina Schart Hyman won the Caldecott Medal for the most distinguished picture book of 1985. BELOW RIGHT: Frank Schoonover's Fritz Striding with Flamingo from *Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss (Harper & Brothers).

ural world was so pronounced that even when his pictures are of an indoors scene, there is an organic nature to the composition. He is a true painter, working in rich and textured oils on large canvases, with careful attention paid — like one of the Old Masters — to the position of light and dark. Wyeth was working at a time when full-color reproduction was enhanced by the newly developed four-color, half-tone process and his pic-

tures, crackling with life, were much in demand by magazine and book publishers. He produced a series of children's classics for Scribner that have recently been re-issued.

His *Robin Hood*, done in 1917, is both romantic and painterly, and the illustration of Robin on his deathbed, bow in hand, and flanked by the dark, weeping figure of Little John, is characteristic of Wyeth's best work. The figure of Robin is brilliantly limned, but it is the bow and the pointing arrow, leading the viewer's eye off to the left and into infinity, that holds the painting together. It is a powerful, moving picture that succeeds beyond the limits of the page.

**Jack and the Beanstalk** by Gustaf Tenggren

Born in Sweden in 1896 and educated there, Gustaf Tenggren did his first professional illustrations at the age of 21. Three years later he crossed the Atlantic to become a staple of the American children's book

scene. He had several styles: A stylized and very basic Germanic look which he used most often in picture books for the youngest children; a pre-Disney Disneyesque watercolor look which he used to good effect in some of his fairy tales; and a more ornate and arabesque pen drawing he cultivated for the *Oriental* and *Arabian Nights* work. He was a prolific and facile illustrator, without great depth, but his color work retains a pleasing European dignity. This can be seen best in the *Jack and the Beanstalk* painting, in which a bloated, sleeping giant is blissfully unaware of the knobby-kneed Jack about to steal his gold. Note the repeating round images: bags, coins, knees, earring. They, and the profusion of greens and teals in the picture have a lulling effect. The viewer is not frightened or disturbed despite the sharpness of the blade by the giant's side. It is simply overwhelmed by the softness of the rest of the piece.



Courtesy of the Collection of Trina Schart Hyman

### *St. George and the Dragon* by Trina Schart Hyman

The queen of romantic illustrations, Trina Schart Hyman has made a career of painting remarkable fairy tale books in which each illustration is enclosed within an elaborate border that is more than mere decoration, but is a storytelling technique in itself. She labored for years doing many different kinds of illustrations — some realistic, some fanciful — but always came back to the fairy tale perhaps because, as she has written: "I have always felt most comfortable with the old stories linking human drama with the mysteries of nature."

She is a strong draftsman, a careful researcher, and works in powerful compositions. Her illustrations are done first as black-and-white line drawings in pencil, brush, and ink. The color is laid on with acrylics, often earth tones touched by spots — or flashes —



From the collection of Gerald Schoenwald, Boston

of color. If occasionally charm overpowers art, it is a charm we cheerfully succumb to.

In *St. George and the Dragon*, a retelling by Margaret Hodges, Hyman did some of her most interesting work. It won her the Caldecott Medal for the most distinguished picture book of 1985. The picture, framed like a window, lends a certain distance to the viewer. We are observers of the scene, as if the story of St. George and the terrible wyrm were a passion play and we the audience. It is a kind of calculated hokum, but hokum with a heart. We are asked to admire, to cheer, to enjoy — but not to believe too thoroughly — in the unfolding drama. It is a parable in paints. It is brilliant bookmaking.

Other artists fantasy lovers will not want to miss in the show include Gennady Spirin, Arthur Rackham, Jessie Willcox Smith, Edward Gorey, Kay Nielsen, William Joyce, Charles Santore, and many, many more. ■



A Horogubler? What in heaven's name is a Horogubler?"

"You ought to know, lady. Your spell summoned me. And I'd like to say I'm really happy to be here."

"Spell? What spell? I just moved in the last of my chinaware and finished reading the benediction my Aunt Madelaine sent me for blessing the new apartment."

"Yeah? Well, the old lady's Celtic ain't all that great, but ..."

"Celtic?! It was in German!"

"So maybe your *German* ain't all that great. Machts nix. I'm here now — your own personal Horogubler. You won't need this other stuff anymore."

# GRANDMA'S BLESSING

BY FRANK C. GUNDERLOY, JR.  
*Illustration by Michael Dubisch*

*We've never seen a blessing  
so thoroughly and totally mixed.*

"What do you mean, 'other stuff'? A second ago my prize grandfather clock was sitting right here in the hall, then — Poof! — it's gone and I'm talking to a moon-faced little freak in a Seven Dwarf's costume. What I need is *you* gone and my clock back."

"Lady, don't you understand? *I am* your clock. Call me Horo — I'm here to fulfill your every horological desire. Like I said, you won't need this other stuff."

The little dwarf-creature unfolded itself from its cross-legged position on the floor, windmilled its arms about, and muttered some words I couldn't quite understand.

"Yikes!" I squealed, as my wristwatch melted into a Dali-esque blob, sliding from my arm to slosh into a faintly steaming puddle on the floor. Upstairs, I could hear my clock radio suddenly click alive with a bit of "Strawberry Fields," only to die again with a sound like a large firecracker exploding. From kitchen and living room came sizzling noises that — as I later discovered — marked the demise of the digital circuits in my VCR, TV, and microwave.



"There!" said the Horogubler, "So much for the competition. Now only my time is your time." He hummed a few bars.

"Damn!" I said, rubbing my wrist. "You almost blistered me."

"Sorry. Here — sit down for a moment."

"Setzen sie," said a squeaky voice behind me. I spun around to see another dwarf — this time built along the dimensions of a footstool — holding up two *extremely* broad palms to me.

"Setzen sie," it repeated.

"Well," said Horo, "Looks like your auntie's spell freed up the whole household. Now you've got your own personal Setzen-gubler. Go on, have a seat."

"Not on your life," I said. "No way am I going to put my glutes in the paws of some little ape in a chamois suit. Hey! Did that thing using to be my good leather armchair?"

"Of course!" said Horo.

"Well, now, this has just got to stop before ..."

"Third hour of the second watch!" interrupted Horo. "All's well."

"All is not well, and ... Wait a minute! What's this 'hour of the watch' stuff?"

"The time. You were thinking something had to be done before your boyfriend Franklin got here, and you wanted to know the time."

"You've got to be kidding. That's not how to tell time. The time is like 'ten minutes after three' or something."

"That's as close as I can come. Worked fine for Queen Guinevere. Don't see where you get off complaining," said Horo, turning up his nose with a peckish sniff.

"Oh, this is too much," I said, steadying myself with a shoulder to the wall.

"SETZEN SIE!" came a thundering voice from the living room, and into the hall lumbered a set of Siamese footstool-dwarfs, joined at the hip. Four of those uninvitingly upturned palms were waving my way.

"Don't tell me," I said.

"Sofasetzen-gubler," said Horo. "Look out. The other one will have to do battle with it for the privilege of supporting you."

I flattened myself against the wall as Setzen-gubler No. 1 charged past, two fists flailing at the offending newcomer. However, four fists are better than two, and No. 2, despite No. 1's bravado attack, slam-dunked its opponent upside-down into the corner, where it struggled like a capsize tortoise to right itself.

"SETZEN SIE," snorted the victor, proudly giving itself a high twenty before presenting itself again.

"Go away," I said. "I think I need to lie down instead."

"Good idea," said Horo. "Wait 'til you see the bedroom. Your Schlafengubler is such a lovely creature. Such a broad, soft belly to sink into. To say nothing of the magic fingers. You'll be so comfy. And I promise to wake you before Franklin gets here."

I had this creepy-skinned vision of trying to sleep in the clutches of a hairless gorilla, when an even creepier vision crossed my mind.

I suddenly realized I desperately needed to go to the bathroom.

"HELLO — AUNT MADELAINE? CAN YOU HEAR ME ALL RIGHT?"

The Tegubler made a beep-burping noise. Horo had spent a good ten minutes reassuring me that the apparition resembling a dwarf with an elephant's head was really my telephone. I held the trunk to my ear like an antiquated receiver, and gingerly spoke into an office I hesitate to describe.

"Alice? Is that you, dear? This is a terrible connection. I keep hearing someone tooting a trumpet. Let me call you back."

"No! Wait! Listen — that benediction you sent me — where did you get that?"

"From your grandmother's things, dear. She had a blessing for every occasion. I thought you might like it — something to remember her by."

"Aunt Madeline, tell me — did you ever use it yourself?"

"No, dear — of course not. I never wanted to be anywhere but right here. That mother of yours had the itchy feet — moved all the way out there to Milwaukee. Cleveland wasn't good enough for her, no siree. Why I remember when we were girls, she always said ..."

"Please, Aunt Madeline, could you forget about all that for just

a little while? What else did Grandma have benedictions for? And did you ever use any of them?"

"Well, I did try the one for blessing the Christmas fruitcakes, but that was the year the cat stole them all while they were cooling. Leastwise, I think the cat got them — they were gone when I got back to the kitchen. That was a terrible Christmas, anyhow. Your Uncle Claude got into the rum and swore he saw a pack of giant raisins running down the street. I declare, I can't watch those TV ads from California without thinking of your Uncle Claude."

"Fifth hour of the second watch," announced Horo. "Franklin approaches."

"Oh, darn. Aunt Madeline, I'll have to call you back. See if you can remember any more of Grandma's blessings, will you? Maybe something for getting rid of pests — killing cockroaches — anything to do with hobgoblins. OK? Bye."

"Hobgoblins, indeed," said Horo. "Hmph! Sixth hour of the second watch. Franklin has arrived. Right on the button."

"Listen, Horo, could you hide in the closet just long enough for me to kinda break this stuff about spells and all a little gently? Maybe take the Setzen-gubler with you?"

"Won't matter. It's your personal spell — Franklin won't notice anything out of the ordinary."

I suddenly became aware of pounding noises and a muffled voice calling my name.

"I'm coming as fast as I can!" I answered, but the voice had already shifted into a series of petulant curses.

"What's going on?" I asked Horo. "I thought I gave him his own key when we started moving my things down last week."

"The Torgubler won't let him in."

"Tor... Doorgubler!" I dashed to the hallway, but it was too late. A creature resembling a bloated eunuch stood blocking the doorway, scimitar in hand. I heard a car door slam, followed by the screeching tires of an angry departure.

"What have you done?" I wailed.

"No recognition talismans. Strange man's key wouldn't work," said the Torgubler.

"Don't worry," said Horo. "He probably thinks you just changed the lock."

"Oh, no-o-oh. Leave me alone — go away, all of you."

"But we're here to help you," said Horo. "You're just tired. Come on, we'll get the Waschbeckengubler to run some nice cool water to splash on your face, and then you can use the Johanngubler, and you'll feel a lot better."

"No way! I am definitely not going back into that ceramic snake pit. One of those things in there had *teeth*."

"They'll all be insulted."

"I don't care. I'll just take myself down to the corner to Mort's Place. The ladies room has fixtures I can recognize. You can all be just as insulted as you want."

I turned for the door, expecting to stalk out in my haughtiest fashion.

"Talisman, please," said the Torgubler.

"Hey — it's me. Step aside."

"Talisman!" it shouted, waving the scimitar, and bumping me with its fat belly. I stumbled backward, clutching at my faithful companion.

"Horo! Help me! Make it let me out."

"I'm doing my best, but it's your spell. If you don't know the talismans, it's not my fault."

"But — but — Oh, what's the use?"

"Setzen sie," came a small voice behind me. The two-handed version had managed to regain its feet, and had sneaked down the hallway without being seen.

Oh, what the heck?, I thought, plopping myself down.

The way this day was going, those upturned palms didn't feel half-bad.

"REALLY, ALICE, THIS IS RIDICULOUS. FIRST YOU LOCK ME OUT, NOW YOU CALL ME TO COME BACK, AND MAKE ME CLIMB THROUGH THE WINDOW

to get in. What's going on?"

"The door must be stuck," I answered lamely, helping Franklin squeeze his paunchy frame through the narrow opening.

"Ouch! Look out where you're putting that knee," said the Fenstergubler, giving me a nasty look. Its translucent bat-wings were fully drawn back, making as large an opening as it could, but Franklin was barely managing to wedge his broad beam through. At least it didn't require a talisman to open. The Fenstergubler, that is.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I should think so," answered Franklin. "Why didn't you just call the landlord to fix your dumb door? Use your head, Alice."

"Who's he calling dumb?" came a voice from the hallway.

"Make him mind his manners," said my inseparable Horo. "Or his head's the one that'll get used — for a doorstep."

"Don't call my Tor — er — my door 'dumb.'"

"What difference does it make what I call your door? I just got here and already you're trying to pick a fight."

"What's his problem?" said Horo. "You must have been pretty stupid to hook up with this character."

"I was not stupid!" I said.

"Well!" said Franklin, drawing himself erect with a huff. "Who's calling names now?"

"Honk!" snorted the Telegubler.

"What was that?" said Franklin.

"The phone," I said. Then to Horo, "I thought he wasn't supposed to notice the difference."

Horo shrugged, stared at the ceiling. "Spell must be leaking a little," he said.

"Who wouldn't notice?" said Franklin.

"Sounds like a sick cow. Always have to have this fancy stuff. Couldn't be satisfied with one that just rang, could you?"

"Honk! HO-O-O-N-NK!"

"First hour of the third watch. It's your aunt again," announced Horo.

"Could you see if you can get the door unstuck while I talk to her?" I asked Franklin.

"Talk to who?" he answered. "I swear, Alice, you're really trying my patience today."

He gave me one of his "why don't you shape up and do things right for a change" looks and disappeared into the hallway. I snatched the Telegubler from its perch, ignoring its frantic kicking as I dangled it in midair with its trunk jammed to my ear.

"Aunt Madeline, is that you?"

"Alice, dear, you got me to thinking, so I went through your grandmother's things again, and guess what I found?"

"A whole book full of blessings, I hope. Read me the one about casting out evil spirits."

"Why, no, dear — whatever made you think of something like that? My goodness, you're just like your mother, what with so much imagination. Always making up stories about elves, and trolls, and porcupines in heaven, and I don't know what-all. I used to call her 'The Brain' because she had such a..."

"Alice!" came Franklin's voice from the hall. "No wonder your door won't work — it doesn't have any doorknobs."

"What'd you expect?" said the Torgubler.

"It's voice-activated! The password is 'Fathead,'" I yelled, using the first word that popped into my mind.

"Why, that too, dear, but never to her face. Now how did you know that? Not that she didn't call me some nasty names herself. Why I remember once she..."

"Auntie — please! You found something of Grandma's?"

"I've been trying to tell you, dear. I found the tortoise-shell dresser set she loved so much. She had it wrapped in towels and stuck in the bottom drawer of her steamer trunk."

"Oh," I said, not trying to hide my disappointment. Out in the hallway I could hear Franklin trying "Fathead" in different tones and cadences, and the Torgubler responding with a chant of "Talisman! Talis-man!"

"Ask her about the mirror," whispered Horo. Then loudly, "First hour of the third watch and all's well!"

"Why, yes, dear, I am well, thank you. I was just about to tell you about the mirror. Whenever your grandmother picked up her dresser mirror, she'd always say, 'The best blessing is no blessing at all.' Those were her exact words."

"Aunt Madeline, I don't see how..."

"Those were her 'fixit' words, dear. Your mother would get herself all upset pretending about witches or spooks or something, and she'd come running to your grandmother and say 'Mamma, say the fixit words,' and your grandmother would laugh and reach for her mirror, and then things would go back to normal."

"What do you mean, 'go back to normal?'"

"Well, your mother wouldn't be upset anymore, and if anything peculiar was happening, like thumping noises in the basement, or the floor tilting, or those funny green lights bouncing up the attic stairs, it would stop."

"Aunt Madeline, listen! Send me that mirror right away! You go right down to the post office — No! — use FedEx — No! — Better still, see if you can get a plane ticket and..."

"...would work," mumbled Horo.

"What?" I said, looking down at him.

"Any mirror would work," whispered Horo again, glancing furtively from side to side. "Don't tell 'em I told you."

"Aunt Madeline, nevermind," I said, tossing the wriggling Telegubler into the outstretched hands of the Sofasetzengubler.

"Oh, Horo," I said, sweeping him up into my arms. "I love you."

"Alice," said Franklin, picking that exact moment to come back from the hallway.

"Will you please explain to me just exactly why you are kissing the dock?"

"Get lost," said Horo. "Second hour of the third watch, and all is — indeed! — well!"

It took me a second to realize that he was kissing back. And that he seemed equipped with a lot more hands than any clock I'd ever seen.

I'D POLISHED AND REPOLISHED THE MIRROR from my purse.

I'd called Aunt Madeline twice more to make sure the "fixit" words were just right.

I'd spoken them into, around, beside, and upside-down to the mirror.

And nothing happened. Horo was leaning unconcerned against the wall, smiling and inspecting his fingernails, watching the Sofasetzengubler weave the Telegubler's tail into an elaborate cat's cradle.

"Horo, what am I doing wrong?" I asked.

"Don't ask me," he answered.

"I thought you were trying to help," I said.

"I've changed my mind — I like it around here now." He looked up and grinned at me.

Out in the hallway, Franklin was noisily prying away at the edges

*Continued on page 77*

# The apparition resembling a dwarf with an elephant's head was really my telephone.

*Adults know what a unicorn stands for, but do the people  
who really need to know have the information?*

# BETH'S UNICORN

BY LAWRENCE WATT-EVANS

*Illustration by Ken Graning*

BETH HAD LOVED the unicorn once; she had thought it was the most beautiful, wonderful thing in the world.

That had been when she was just a little kid, though. Now that she was almost fifteen, the whole idea of having her very own unicorn somehow seemed a little bit silly. None of her friends had unicorns — or at least, if they did, they didn't talk about them. And grown-ups, like her parents, didn't even *believe* in unicorns, so far as she could tell.

Beth believed in unicorns — she had to, since one lived in the woods behind her house and followed her around every chance it got.



The unicorn had been living out there, and following her around, for as long as she could remember. It had definitely been an old friend by the time she had started the first grade, all those years ago — she could still remember the embarrassment when she told her first-grade teacher that she had her very own unicorn that lived out back. Beth had thought it was a perfectly reasonable thing to say.

The teacher hadn't believed a word of it. She had said that it was a very nice story, and then when Beth's mother came to school for conferences she had talked to Beth's mother about invisible playmates and how important it was not to stifle a child's imagination. Beth's mother had repeated this, in a tone of mild puzzlement, to Beth.

Nobody else she knew still admitted to ever having even *seen* a real, live unicorn.

She was almost grown-up now, Beth told herself as she looked at herself in the mirror. She was almost a woman. She didn't look like a kid playing dress-up any more when she put on make-up and wore heels.

And Josh, who was almost seventeen, didn't think she was a little kid. He'd agreed to drive her to the mall and shop with her — it was practically a date! Her first date!

Dates, boys ... who wanted unicorns?

She glanced out the window of her bedroom, and there was the unicorn standing under the trees, looking up at her, its golden horn

# When Beth was little she had thought that was pretty neat, having a magical animal that wouldn't let anyone else near it, and she had given it names ...

"Do you have an invisible playmate, Beth?" she had asked.

Beth had silently shaken her head. The unicorn wasn't invisible. And it wasn't really much of a playmate, either. It couldn't talk or anything. It didn't have hands, so it couldn't throw a ball or a Frisbee, or dress and undress Barbies, or play any good games. It was pretty good at tag — though Beth had to be careful when they played, because that horn was *sharp*; she had gone back inside with nasty little cuts once or twice. It was OK at races and things like that, though it could outrun a little girl so easily that it wasn't really fair, but it wasn't good for much else, so far as Beth could see.

It wasn't any fun playing hide-and-seek with the unicorn because it could just plain disappear; Beth *never* found it when it hid. Now that she was older she wasn't all that sure she'd have said it wasn't invisible. It wasn't *always* invisible, but sometimes she wasn't sure.

Whether it was invisibility or ordinary stealth at work, it never let anyone else see it — only Beth.

When Beth was little she had thought that was pretty neat, having a magical animal that wouldn't let anyone else near it, and she had given it names and pretended she was secretly a princess and the unicorn was the only one who knew it, and had played a lot of other silly baby games, but she had gotten tired of all that. None of the names had stuck, anyway; the unicorn never cared what she called it.

Now she just called it "the unicorn," when she called it anything at all. It wasn't as if she'd ever seen any others.

And she wasn't sure she liked seeing the one. All in all, Beth preferred other kids as playmates.

She wondered whether any of the other girls in the neighborhood had unicorns that followed them around when they were alone. She knew the boys didn't; they'd always made fun of her when she talked about it. Sometimes that was almost as bad as the grown-ups not believing her.

But some of the other girls had said they had unicorns, too, and had described them and told Beth their names — but she was never sure if they were serious, or just pretending, going along with Beth's stories.

It didn't matter. She was too old for all that stuff now, anyway.

gleaming in the light of the setting sun.

"Screw you, unicorn!" Beth said. She thumbed her nose at it, and danced out the door of her room and down the stairs to wait for Josh.

It wasn't a long wait.

"You look pretty," he said, when she answered the door.

"Thanks," she answered, smiling foolishly. She knew she looked silly the way she was grinning, but she couldn't stop. She bounced down the steps toward the car waiting at the curb. Josh had borrowed his mother's car; Beth climbed in carefully, almost catching her high heels on the doorframe.

Beth had a fine time at the mall; Josh didn't even act bored when she looked at clothes she couldn't afford. They got giant cookies, and ate them while sitting by the fountain in the center of the mall, and talked about school and music and TV and stuff. And Josh held her hand.

Then he drove her home, and when he pulled up in front of the house he came around and opened the car door for her, like someone in an old movie, and when she got out he leaned over and kissed her.

She was scared and excited, and kissed him back, and put her hands on his shoulders.

His arms went around her and the kiss continued, and she felt his hand sliding down her back. She thought she was on the verge of trembling. This was thrilling and frightening at the same time, and she wasn't sure what she should do, whether she should stop or what.

She liked it, though — until the unicorn squealed.

Josh started and pulled away from her. He turned, and saw the unicorn standing a dozen feet away, pawing the ground with a cloven hoof, that golden horn lowered and pointed straight at his chest.

Beth turned, as well.

She had seen the unicorn do that before. It was getting ready to charge. She had seen it charge any number of times over the years.

Always before, though, it had charged at nothing. This time it looked ready to charge at Josh.

And that horn was *sharp*.



"Stop it!" she called angrily, her voice unsteady. "You stop that this minute!"

The unicorn raised its head and whinnied; the hoof stopped moving. It looked astonished.

"And just what do you think you're doing?" Beth demanded, facing the unicorn with her hands on her hips. "He wasn't hurting me!"

The unicorn stared at her for a moment, then lowered its head again.

Josh stepped away from her, his hands dropping away from her, and Beth felt as if she wanted to cry. "You just go away, unicorn!" she shouted.

The unicorn raised its head and looked at her, and a tear appeared in one eye. It didn't leave, though; it stood its ground.

Beth still felt like crying herself, but she didn't know why. She didn't even *like* the unicorn anymore. And why was it acting like this? She hadn't been doing anything to harm it.

It acted as if it were trying to protect her, but protect her from *what*? From Josh? Josh hadn't been hurting her; quite the contrary.

Maybe she was angry because her first real kiss had been ruined, but it was too late now — the kiss was ruined and there wasn't anything that could be done about it. And maybe the unicorn had meant well.

It was still staring at her unhappily.

"Oh, all right, you can stay," Beth said, "but don't you touch Josh!" The unicorn nodded reluctantly, and Beth turned back to Josh.

He was too busy staring at the unicorn to notice at first. Then turned and stared at her instead.

"That's a unicorn!" he said breathily.

"Yeah, I know," Beth said. She grimaced. "It's mine, I guess."

Josh blinked in astonishment. "You have a unicorn!"

"Yeah." She stood, wanting him to hold her again but unsure how

Beth frowned. "I don't think I'm special," she said. "And I don't care if you drive it away." But she looked at the unicorn again, and with a bit more interest in it than she had of late.

Special? Because she had a unicorn?

Nobody else did, true, but she'd always just thought that made her *weird*, not special. It wasn't as if she'd ever *wanted* a unicorn.

It really *was* a beautiful animal, though — a little smaller than a horse, bigger than a pony, all of it shining white except the horn and hooves, which were golden. A little beard, like a goat's, hung from its chin; its tail was a swirling brush of gleaming white curls, not straight like a horse's tail.

It was still looking straight at her.

For the first time it occurred to her that the silly animal loved her. If it really did leave for good, she realized, she would miss it.

"It would care if it had to leave you," Josh said, pointing at the tears that were dribbling slowly down the unicorn's face. "I couldn't do that to it."

"I guess not," Beth admitted.

"I never saw a unicorn before," Josh said. "I thought they were just in stories!"

Beth shrugged.

Josh looked from the unicorn to Beth, then back to the unicorn.

"You must be really special," he said again.

Beth didn't know what to say.

"I better go," Josh said. He backed away, around the car, watching the unicorn the entire time.

Beth stood there on the sidewalk and watched as Josh climbed into the car and drove slowly away, almost stalling the engine as he stared at the unicorn. She felt both sad and somehow relieved — the kiss had been exciting, but scary.

Then she looked around, and saw the neighbors staring at her

*It really was a beautiful animal, though — a little smaller than a horse, bigger than a pony, all of it shining white except the horn and hooves, which were golden.*

to make it happen. "Listen, Josh, I ... I'm sorry it did that, I don't know what's wrong with it. It never threatened anyone before. I mean, it never even let anyone but me see it before."

"It was protecting you," Josh said, stepping back, away from Beth. She wanted to cry. "But you weren't hurting me!" she said. "I don't want to be protected!"

"Yeah, but ..." Josh stammered. "I ... I mean, Beth, unicorns ... you have to be a virgin to have a unicorn around."

She looked up at him, puzzled. "So?" she said. "You thought I wasn't?"

"Well, I ..." He shook his head. "No, I mean, don't you have to be not just a virgin, but you know, a true innocent, or something?"

She shrugged. "I don't know; I never studied unicorns. I don't think I'm an innocent — I mean, not any more than anyone else. I know, you know, stuff." She laughed nervously.

"But you must be special. You have a unicorn!"

"I don't *want* a unicorn!"

"But I don't want to be responsible for driving it away — I mean, you must be really *special*."

from half a dozen windows and porches — no, not at her; at the unicorn. She turned, and saw her parents staring from the front window, as well.

Maybe having her own unicorn was something special, after all. She walked up to the unicorn and brushed away its tears, then hugged it around the neck.

"OK," she said, "you can stay for awhile. You're going to have to leave some day, because I really *am* growing up, and I can't keep a unicorn around forever — but you can stay for awhile."

Then she let it go.

She watched as the unicorn pranced off into the woods; then she turned and walked into the house, wondering how she could explain the unicorn's presence to her parents — surely, they'd want to know where it had come from, and when, and why. They'd want to know why she'd never told them about it before ...

Wouldn't they?

Maybe not, she realized. Maybe she wouldn't have to explain anything at all. Maybe they'd just accept it, the way she always had.

Maybe, she thought, they already knew all that mattered. *•*

## The Cambrian Explosion and Future Films (Yes, this is the Games column).

ANYONE WHO EVER STUDIED PALEONTOLOGY IS SOON CONFRONTED BY THE IDEA OF THE Cambrian Explosion. Back before the Cambrian — a time that geologists cleverly call the Precambrian — life was simple. Really simple. For billions of years, things went along with some blue-green algae here, maybe a little bacteria there. Life was so conservative that even Rush Limbaugh would have been bored.

Then, toward the very end of the Precambrian, you start to get little hints that something interesting is going on. Strange things were cropping up in puzzling groups like the Ediacara Fauna. There were creatures that looked like fountain pens, and little rugose balls, and something that might have sorta kinda maybe been a little like a worm. It's not clear if any of these creatures left relatives in the modern world, but their appearance hinted that things were about to change. And then they did.

Almost overnight, the seas filled up with creatures of all sorts: jellyfish, sponges, corals, trilobites. You name it, it was there. That's the Cambrian Explosion.

In a geologic eye blink, all the phyla of modern creatures appeared. Then, after a very short time, the door on new phyla appears to have swung shut. (All right, the Bryozoa may not have appeared until later. But who cares about a bunch of squishy little "moss animals" anyway? Would you even know a Bryozoan if you saw it?)

That initial burst provided the raw material and basic body form for every creature that lives today. Evolution since the start of the Cambrian has been nothing more

than ringing the changes on what was already there. After the Cambrian Explosion, the score is variation 9 trillion, innovation 0.

So, what does any of this have to do with games? If you study any new development, you'll find that the Cambrian Explosion model is repeated in everything from business to The Beatles. Stunning innovations bring with them the sudden appearance of widely divergent forms. Then theme and variation take over. Computer and video games are a good example of the model.

For computer games, the Precambrian runs from ENIAC until about the mid-'70s. People coded games into

computers almost from the start. From building-sized monsters to wire-boarded Heathkits, there was hardly a machine that could not play a rousing game of tic-tac-toe or *Nim*. But computers were gradually getting smaller and more powerful. They were also adding displays that let them update an active screen, rather than print their results to paper or a dumb terminal. The explosion was near.

A fellow by the name of Nolan Bushnell shoved something called *Space War* into a few bars. He was called back in a few days and told the machines were malfunctioning. They were — the cash box was full. Over on the home computer side, the Ediacara Fauna of the big computers was leaking onto the first generation of micros in the form of simple strategy games and text adventure games. Sales of these new machines began to grow. Then Bushnell took some of the components from *Space War* and made a simpler game. Something he called *Pong*.

The explosion was on. Bushnell became a millionaire fast enough to shock Wall Street, and his company, Atari, became a household word. People like Roberta Williams bound

*Sarah, the daughter of a homicidal doctor, explores a hospital straight out of your worst nightmare in the interactive game D.*





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*"Then down he swooped straight through the arrow-storm, reckless in his rage, taking no heed to turn his scaly sides towards his foes, seeking only to set their town ablaze."*

— *The Hobbit*

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stairs, far enough away that we can't hear the conversation. Pow. Eric invades one of their minds. Now we're close up, seeing through the eyes of one of the women, and hearing every word. Up on the stairs, a man is walking by. Zoom. We're in his skull. We see him go past the talking women, and go with him to the top of the stairs. Once there, we hop into the mind of another woman who walks by, and ride her down to the point where she joins into the conversation of the first pair. With all three talking, we can change skulls at will, going round and round and seeing the conversation from all sides.

The transitions are seamless, and just as dizzying as they sound. Ten seconds into this game, and I knew this was the real thing. Imagine watching a scene on a television show and being able to follow that interesting stranger out of the room. This is the kind of interaction I really want to see in future films. The feeling of power will have you chuckling like an escapee from the Mt. Olympus loony bin. By dropping in on minds, and eavesdropping on conversations, Eric gets the information he needs to act. Back in his own skull, he aids his client in figuring out the dirty goings on in her twisted family, and stopping things before they get any worse.

The numbers of ways you can interact with the cast and the variations on what can happen are vastly larger than in most such products. By keeping the scenes short and open-ended, Colossal has managed to produce a game that can be played a dozen times, or a hundred, without seeing it the same way twice.

In addition to the production values at the filmmaking end, which are above average, this program boasts game technology that is jaw dropping. The video is as crisp as on your VCR. Digital special effects have been added to the video in a way that will have you wondering if you're having a '60s flashback. But the most amazing part is how well it all hangs together. I don't know how Electronic Arts made this game operate so smoothly, but my hat is off to them.

In some ways its story is less compelling than that of *D*, but it delivers more kick in the end and is backed up by good performances. *Psychic Detective* is also a technological blockbuster, setting the stage for what I hope are many more such programs to come. With all there is to see in this game, the price of owning your own copy sounds like a decent deal.

By now you've surely heard the puns. Hollywood-vined. Silliwound. Ever since the movie moguls noticed that the game companies were hauling in more cash than they were, Hollywood has been proclaiming the future merger of games and movies. Until now interactive movies have been the bryozoa of the gaming industry, strange little things with very limited range. But with games like *D* and *Psychic Detective*, we may be seeing the start of a whole new kingdom. ■

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## EMPEROR

Continued from page 35

Yet still the spirit dwelled within, its earthen thoughts as slow as the erosion of rock. And he demanded of it, "Who are you to be here in my empery, and what are you doing here?"

Its sluggish thoughts responded, "I am that I am, and it is my nature to be here."

"Very well," the sorcerer replied. "What have you to do with the wild growth upon the surface of my world?"

"I am unsure of your question," it answered. "It is the nature of surfaces to support life. It is the nature of life to grow."

"This is my world," he told it. "I created it, I command it, nothing may occur save but by my will."

"Then all must be as it should be," said the creature, and if there was mocking in its voice, the sorcerer could not hear it. Yet still it angered him.

"I could destroy you in an instant," he told it. But its nature was only to exist; it could not even be said to be truly alive, certainly it had no fear of death. He would take no pleasure or satisfaction from its obliteration, and such an act would avail him nothing. The wild growth was not this creature's doing.

So he departed.

HE OPENED HIS EYES WITHIN HIS MEDITATION chamber. He needed no clairvoyance to tell him that his foe was at his castle's gate. He could hear its crackle, smell its vile saprophytic stench, taste it upon the air.

His own fear also was what he tasted.

With a final dissident effort he raised his voice and demanded the attention of the elder gods. He cried his right of combat, of satisfaction. He taunted the deeps with insults and challenges. He offered the destruction of his soul.

There came no reply. He sensed only a great emptiness, a slumbering infinity, as if the gods were long done answering, and wanted now to only sleep.

And he realized that he too was tired. So very tired. He lay down upon his marble floor, and closed his eyes as he has not done in a thousand, perhaps a thousand thousand years.

And he slept.

And his dreams were filled with green.

WHEN I TOLD HIM MY THOUGHTS ON HOW the story should end, my friend looked at me first with the look of someone confronted by mild insanity. Then he just shook his head and gave a dismissive wave.

"No," he said. "That's not it."

I saw him only once after that, several years later. I'd heard stories about the missed deadlines, professional disasters, and monetary troubles that included property seizures by the IRS. I'd also heard of his outré romantic involvements, assuming that one can call such sordid affairs romantic

just because a romantic was involved in them. Art reflects life; life imitates art.

Still later, when he was diagnosed with cancer, the irony (if irony is strong enough a word) became nearly more than I could bear. I really couldn't think of my friend without wondering if he'd ever found an ending that satisfied him.

I saw him just briefly that one last time, in a hotel lobby waiting to check out. He stood there with his most recent girlfriend's arm about his waist, as much to give him support as from affection, though I guess the willingness to lend support may be a more certain sign of affection than many others. She seemed nicer than his last few lovers had seemed. To me, anyway, she seemed nice.

He smiled when he saw me, and gave a little wave. "My plane leaves in only an hour or I'd stay to talk," he said. "I know I've been in a bit of an eclipse lately, but things finally seem to be settling down. Give us a call in a few weeks and we'll chat."

I nodded and said something inane and encouraging. Maybe it's only in retrospect that I knew I'd never see him again. He died two weeks later, of heart failure, worn out from the chemotherapy and the surgeries.

The heart always fails in the end.

I don't believe in God, or Man's Immortal Soul. I once heard someone say that in some Eastern traditions, the spirit is compared to a candle flame. It doesn't go anywhere when it dies, but while it lives it can light other flames. I always liked the sound of that.

Every writer strikes sparks once in a while. Sometimes a spark will start a flame. Every writer gets a chance at creating a perfect ending in a perfect world.

HE WOKE TO THE SOUNDS OF BUZZING insects and the flash of sunlight in his face. Light spilled from an eroded hole in the remnant of a castle wall. All inside was disarray. Bits of stone mortar covered the floor. Ivy swathed the hard stone walls, softening them, as might a tapestry.

The morning dew covered all interior surfaces, sparkling like gems in the many shafts of sunlight. Somewhere outside in the forest a bird called to its mate. The scent of flowers was so thick as to be nearly visible on the air.

He gathered himself and stood and looked around. How long had he slept? He could not tell. A pillow of moss showed where his head had rested. He wore a cloak of finest silk as though spiders had spun it while he slept.

He went down the crumbling stairs to the basement of his keep. There, amid the corpses of his once great engines, he found a few small, simple tools. He climbed the steps again, and left the ruins, and entered into the forest.

There, with axe and saw and wedge and awl, he began to clear a space, to strip and mold the wood, to build a house with his own two hands.

The End ♦



# GRANDMA'S BLESSING

Continued from page 67

of the Torgubler with an assortment of kitchen cutlery.

"Alice," he called. "I think I'm getting it." I didn't answer. I plopped myself down on the floor, wrapped my arms around my head, and leaned against my knees. I only half-heard the Torgubler mutter something like "You stick that knife in there again, and you gonna get something for sure."

"Don't worry," said Horo. "The scimitar isn't very sharp. But then again, neither is your boy Franklin."

"At least," I sniffled, "he doesn't try to take advantage of me like some people I know. And he's trying to help."

"Hey — I'm sorry. If you did nothing but swing your pendulum back and forth for a couple of hundred years, you might get carried away, too. I really do like it here. No offense meant."

"Well—I — all right, you're forgiven," I said. From this vantage point, I realized that he didn't look a day over — what? — twenty-five? thirty? Dancing blue eyes and a slightly twisted, almost boyish, grin made it hard to tell. Strange how your perspective changes when you're not staring down at the top of someone's head. Of course, if I were to walk into Mort's Place on the arm of someone who stood only three feet tall, heads would turn and people would ...

"OW!!" yelled Franklin, mercifully breaking my train of thought. He came rushing in from the hallway, noisily sucking his thumb.

"Cut mu'sel' ona pancake turn," he spluttered around the bleeding digit. "Needa banaid." He disappeared into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

"Wait!" I said. "Don't go in there! Horo, stop him!" I could already hear assorted giggles and gurglings, but Franklin, oblivious to his surroundings, simply began to rattle bottles in the medicine cabinet.

"Horo, what if the spell leaks in the bathroom?" I said.

Horo began to laugh, then abruptly choked in mid-guffaw, turned and ran for the hallway.

"Fourth hour of the third watch, and here comes TROUBLE!!" he shouted over his shoulder.

I stepped into the hallway just as a shrill voice screamed, "Hippocampus, you fat-bellied necrompoo! Now out of my way."

The Torgubler drew back, shielding its face with its scimitar. Horo dropped to all fours and scuttled out through the opening a moment before it was blocked by a sun-burst of flaming red hair, violet mascara, and a Botticellian figure crowded into an orange knit sheath.

"Mother!" I gasped.

"Really, Alice," she said, poking her head into the living room and taking in my collection of cowering gublers at one glance. "For once your Aunt Madelaine was right. I

should never have let you leave Milwaukee. Here, give me that."

She snatched the mirror, and began to chant. "Seben kienen den ist ..."

It took me a moment to realize that she was saying the "fixit" words backward in German. I slapped my palm to my forehead and closed my eyes. Why hadn't I thought of that? When I could bear to look again, my mother was sitting on a perfectly ordinary sofa, touching up her manicure.

"Nice apartment, sweetheart," she said. "But I really don't think too much of your decor."

My eyes followed her gesture to the now-open bathroom door. There, amid the usual grouping of innocent appearances, stood a rickety pot-bellied stove.

SINCE TUESDAY NIGHTS ARE A LITTLE SLOW, Mort had the lights turned up a notch brighter than on the weekends, and the exhaust fan was managing to stay ahead of the smoke. A few couples — the only customers, I thought — were crowded together near the TV end of the bar. Nonetheless, shortly after I guided my mother to a quiet booth in the corner, I noticed an inordinate number of unattached men appearing at adjacent tables, and free drinks began to be delivered with astonishing rapidity. Mother acknowledged every beer bottle tossed toward her way with a smile and a nod that somehow said "later" without really promising anything at all.

"Listen, Mother," I said, edging around to get my back to the heavy breathing. "You've got to do something about Franklin."

"Pooh," she answered. "No one will miss him. Somebody that pompous couldn't have been real anyhow. I'll bet some old hag conjured him up in a hardware store by saying the 'no fire down below' spell just for practice."

"Mother, I don't care if he was assembled with an Erector set. You know what a hard time I have meeting new people. And it'll be even worse now that I've moved to a town like Kenosha. Franklin might not have been much, but he was dependable."

"Alice, sweetheart, if you want dependable, I'll whip you up a collie. If you want a man, look around you. How about that nice young fellow at the bar, for instance?"

"Mother!"

"Just a little peek — it won't hurt you. He's better-looking than your father was the first time I saw him, let me tell you."

I half-turned to glance over my shoulder, and found myself locked with an oddly familiar pair of bright blue eyes. The gentleman in question slid his lanky frame from the barstool, and ignoring both my mother and her slavering fan club, walked over to look down at me.

"Hi," he said, grinning boyishly. "My name's Horatio."

Aunt Madelaine, keep those blessings coming. **A**

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**Contributors.**

Jane Yolen has published well over 150 books for children, young adults, and adults. Called "America's Hans Christian Andersen," she will admit only to being a storyteller, which she does in front of admiring crowds at conventions. The story of the sphinx was written (mostly) in Scotland with a wonderful Wendy Froud sphinx staring the author down across a ream of paper. Luckily Jane knew the answer to any of her questions. Janet Aulisio studied at the New York Scenic School of Design and the Ridgewood School of Art in New Jersey. Her illustrations have been appearing for eighteen years in the genre's largest magazines.

Kelly Link was born in Miami, FL, in 1969. She is a graduate of Columbia University and, in 1990, she won a trip around the world by answering "because you can't go through it," to the question, "Why do you want to go around the world?" She attended the Clarion Workshop last summer and has stories forthcoming in *Century* and *Asimov's*. Michael Gibbs' illustrations have appeared in *Science Fiction Age* and many other magazines, newspapers, and books. He has won national and regional awards, including an "odd-looking clear-plastic obelisk-shaped thing" which he keeps on a ledge in his basement. His most beautiful creation, he says, is his infant daughter, Anna Paige.

Thomas E. Fuller is the president and head writer of the Atlanta Radio Theatre Company. His short fiction has appeared in *Tales of the White Wolf*, *More Phobias*, and the forthcoming horror anthology *Gothic Ghosts*. "The God at Midnight" is his first published fiction collaboration with Brad Strickland, though the two are working on a baroque SF novel, *The Empress of Time*. Mr. Fuller lives in Duluth, GA, with his wife Berta and their four children. Brad Strickland has written or co-written eighteen novels, most recently *The Hand of the Necromancer*. He has written more than fifty short stories, and twice his work has been included in *The Year's Best Horror*. He and Thomas E. Fuller have collaborated on a number of radio dramas and adaptations, including *A Glitch in Time*, *H.P. Lovecraft's The Rats in the Walls*, and *The Great Air Monopoly*. He lives in Oakwood, GA, with his wife and occasional collaborator Barbara.



Brad Strickland



Frank Gunderloy, Jr.

Mary O'Keefe Young graduated from Parsons School of Design, NYC, in 1982. She tries to create a magical quality with her watercolors by using dramatic light. Capturing the beauty of human expression is of prime importance in her work.

Lawrence Watt-Evans was born and raised in eastern Massachusetts, the fourth of six children in a house full of books. He grew up reading a wide variety of speculative fiction. He is best known for the "Eithshar" fantasy series, but he has also written dozens of short stories, including the Hugo-winning "Why I Left Harry's All Night Hamburgers." Ken Graning has years of experience as a professional illustrator. Ken's advertising and editorial work has appeared in magazines, trade publications, books, newspapers, posters, corporate brochures, and record album covers.



Jane Yolen



Thomas E. Fuller

James Killus has been appearing in various SF and fantasy magazines for almost fifteen years. He has also published two novels *Book of Shadows* and *Snismoke*. The latter is a computer voodoo killer photochemical smog science fantasy, reflecting his professional life as an atmospheric scientist and photochemist. It is a cult favorite among smog scientists, so it is naturally long out of print. Chuck Demerott graduated from Newark School of Fine and Industrial Art and he has been an illustrator for five years. He lives in North Carolina with his wife and twin daughters, dividing his "spare" time between collecting old and new SF- and fantasy-related toys and his beautiful '63 Cadillac.

Frank C. Gunderloy, Jr. is a retired aerospace and environmental scientist. He's an active volunteer for the California State Park Service and lives in Palm Springs, CA. His stories have been published in *Fantastic*, *Amazing*, and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Fantasy*, as well as many articles in professional journals. He's been married thirty-nine years. Michael Dubisch made his first illustration sale to Fantaco's *Goshriek* #6 in 1987. He is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts, and his cartoons have appeared in every issue of *High Times* for a number of years. ■

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